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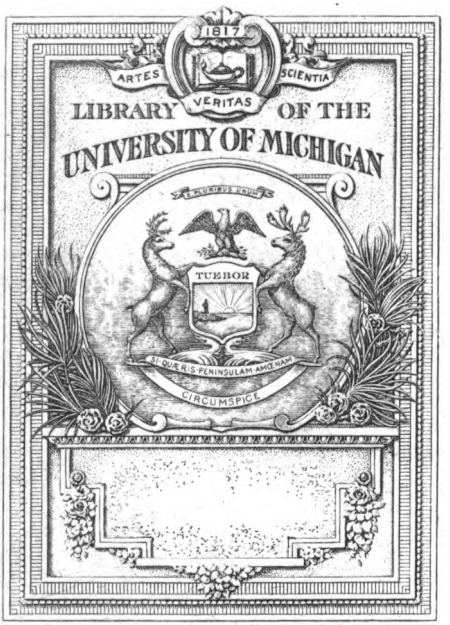

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'BLACKWOOD'

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'Blackwood'
Tales from the Outposts

III
TALES OF THE BORDER

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Edited by

Lieut.-Colonel L. A. Bethell

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'Blackwood'
Tales from the Outposts

III
TALES OF THE BORDER

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EDINBURGH AND LONDON
1932

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TALES OF THE BORDER

I.

BORDER MANNERS.

I. A WARDEN RAID.

"'And, by my faith,' the gate-ward said,
'I think 'twill prove a Warden Raid.'"
—*Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

THE little idiosyncrasies of the Trans-Frontier Pathan, which include rapine and murder, arson, cattle-lifting and sheep-stealing, are, and for many years have been, a constant source of worry, if not despair, to the Indian Government. It may be that in the course of three or four centuries a Pathan Sir Walter Scott will arise who will unearth a Zakha Khel Roderick Dhu, or a Waziri William of Deloraine, and who will surround the exploits of his compatriots with that halo of Romance which is now lacking. But, in the meantime, for the Frontier Officer, whose duties bring him into contact with the Waziri, the Afridi, or the Mohmand, there is little that is romantic in the official dossier of a Frontier raid with its somewhat sordid details of pillage and violence, its trail marked by the lowe of burning villages. The Sirkar's officials live too close to the actual stain of the spilt blood, the glowing ashes of the burnt stacks and ruined homes, to be able to conceive of 'Multan' as anything but a turbulent scoundrel and a treacherous blood-stained

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robber, who richly deserves hanging, and there is no gainsaying the justice of that point of view. And yet, if it has fallen to our lot to repress, as a nation we can hardly dare to cast a stone. There is scarcely an incident in the story of our Indian Frontier that has not its parallel in the annals of the ' Debateable Land ' which lay between England and Scotland in years gone by.

If the Pathan woman passes her new-born son through a hole in the wall, dedicating him as ' clerk of St Nicolas ' with the words ' Ghal shah ' (Be a thief), the once fashionable methods in vogue on either side the line between Berwick-on-Tweed and Carlisle are plainly illustrated by the saying " Elliots and Armstrongs ride thieves all." It is a saying which, if old annals and family records be at all credible, might with truth have been applied to every family of note, or indeed no note, throughout the south of Scotland or the northern counties of England.

Sailgai—the Sperkai Waziri robber—who with five men, within quite recent times, defended for some hours Gumatti Fort against the assault of close on six hundred rifles assisted by a section of mountain artillery, has, in the early sixteenth century, his prototype in Dand or Andrew Ker holding out in his peel of Fairnihirst throughout a long autumn day against the English under Lord Dacres. The story of Sarwar Khan, nicknamed ' Chikhi,' or ' The Lifter,' wanted by the Frontier police for sheep-stealing, paid assassin and leader of a little band of proscribed cut-throats, ending, as it did, in the headship of the Zaimukht clans, who can produce a fighting force of 3500 men, recalls that of the Outlaw Murray, as told in the ' Sang,' who, from ruling over his troop of five hundred broken men, became Sheriff of Ettrick Forest. Sarwar Khan's lair, too, not far from Chinarak at the head of a gorge, which, situated in the hills above the Kurram

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valley, was easily defensible by half a dozen marksmen, reminds one forcibly of the descriptions given of the castle of Lochwood, seat of the chief of the Johnstones, and of the comment made by King James V., that he who built it must have been a knave in his heart. The blood feuds which force Zaman Khan, the Afridi, or Mira Khan, the Mohmand, to plough his fields with his rifle slung across his back ; which keep Mahomed Afzul of Sultan Khel, or Dadai, of the same village, each pent within his tower throughout the hours of daylight ; which built the covered ways leading to the highroad, where the truce of the Border runs and must be kept—differ in no way from the feuds between Scotts and Kerrs, Johnstones and Maxwells. Indeed, for sheer treacherous dealing, it is hard even to equal on the Frontier the cold-blooded murder of Sir James Johnstoun of Dunskellie by John, Lord Maxwell, as described in the Shawfield MSS. Perhaps the rescue of the Border freebooter, Kinmont Willie, out of Carlisle Castle by Buccleugh of Branksome, has no exact counterpart ; but even the sheer effrontery and dare-devilry which were the essence of success in that gallant act can scarcely surpass that required for the looting of, say, Peshawur city, which is one of the largest in Northern India. The city proper, exclusive of suburbs, is surrounded by a high wall, and entrance is only possible through two or three big gateways. Mostly the streets are narrow and tortuous, and a big force of police is always on duty there. The difficulty of carrying out a raid on a place of such magnitude will be at once apparent. When in addition it is remembered that within three miles is almost the biggest cantonment in the Punjab, with a garrison of one cavalry and five infantry regiments, to say nothing of artillery ; that on every road there are guard-houses occupied by armed police, whilst the Khaibar

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Rifles hold all the main entrances into tribal territory; and that, lastly, all these units are linked up by the telephone, and thus can be rapidly concentrated, it would seem sheer lunacy to attempt it. None the less, an armed foray was skilfully planned and successfully carried out by a gang of sixty Zakha Khel Afridis, who got away with booty valued at over a lakh of rupees.

Alike in what, I fear, must be termed crime, there is a resemblance too in their common possession of a keen sense of humour. In 1598 Sir Robert Carey, Warden of the West Marches, to obtain satisfaction for the plunder of the town of Haltwhistle in Cumberland by the Armstrongs, followed that clan across the Border, driving them into their refuge in Tarras Moss. There holding, as he thought, the exits, he determined to starve them into submission. The Armstrongs, however, contrived in spite of his guards to send a party into England, which harried the Warden's own estate, lifted a round dozen of his cattle and returned in safety. Shortly afterwards they sent Sir Robert one of his own cows, with a message that, fearing he might fall short of provisions during his stay in Scotland, they had ventured to send him a present of English beef. Three hundred years later a section of the Orakzais, who had taken part in the attack on the Samana posts, sent in their jirgah and expressed their willingness to come to terms. Amongst others, one of the conditions imposed on the tribe was a heavy fine to be paid in hard cash. The Orakzais forwarded a letter to the Political Officer, reminding him that before the unfortunate differences which had taken place they had always been on the best of terms with him. They therefore suggested that in memory of old times he might see his way to helping them with a subscription towards the payment of the fine levied!

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In the early part of the reign of Henry VIII. a long list of outrages on the English side of the Border led to reprisals. Under the personal leadership of the Earl of Surrey, Warden of the Marches, the English Borderers, by way of a lesson, surprised and burnt the Border town of Jedburgh, with a loss of less than a dozen men, returning unmolested to England. *Mutatis mutandis*, Surrey's report to the King might serve to describe the provocation given by the Khwaja Khels, and the punishment meted out to them by the Commissioner of Pathanshahr.

Owing to a variety of causes—the chief, perhaps, being that of the Irishman who was " blue mouldy for want of a bating "—there was much trouble with the Khwaja Khels, who, with many allied Khels or clans, live just beyond our Administrative Border, though a small number occupy a few villages a short distance within it. The territory of the Trans-Frontier portion of the clans is known as Kohistan, and is a large tract of hilly country bordering on the north Ghilzaistan. It runs to extremes in climate, being very hot in summer and very cold in winter, whilst it is mostly of a poor fertility. Treeless, barren, lacking in water—for few rivers run through it, and the inhabitants depend largely on artificial rain-water tanks to supply their needs—it possesses few attractions. Just outside its southern boundaries the scenery changes as if by magic—thanks to a network of irrigation canals drawn from the Surkhab and Shamil Rivers, two big tributaries of the Indus. Leafy avenues border the roads, willows droop over the canals and villages are embowered in fine trees. The land is a sea of smiling crops : high luscious sugar-cane, graceful maize, tall millet, wheat, cotton, and, in swampy patches, rice, alternate with each other ; while wide stretches of verdant turf afford good grazing ground. Small wonder is it, then, if the Kohistani, gazing

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down from his poverty-stricken hills, is tempted at times to take toll from the prosperity spread out at his feet.

Great events had been taking place in the world. The Crescent had defeated the Cross in Macedonia, and a Pan-Islamic movement was on foot—rumours of which had spread into the Frontier hills. Despite the efforts of the Nawab of Ghilzaistan, and in defiance of his prohibition, several of the more turbulent of his subjects had crossed into Kohistan to assist the Khwaja Khels. In especial, a one-eyed Fakir of great reputed sanctity had left Amirabad, the Nawab's capital, with a following of five hundred men. This man, by name Saiyid Mir Bashir, was an uneducated, bigoted fanatic, but gifted with a fluent tongue and of great influence, as he laid claim to miraculous powers. Like many of his confrères, he promised, by virtue of his charms, to turn hostile bullets to water, whilst those of true believers should have a deadly effect on their foes. But where he out-bid other miracle-mongers, was in that he claimed the power to bring the waters of a mountain torrent down in spate at his pleasure, though the bed might be bone-dry, by this means overwhelming his enemies; or he could reverse the miracle and dam a racing flood with a word, thus enabling his followers to cross dry-shod. Further, he asserted that he could bring rain at will, a really useful accomplishment in a country where water is scarce and the rainfall most exiguous and uncertain. These are but a tithe of the powers with which he was credited, and though it would seem almost impossible he should find anyone to believe in him, there were not wanting witnesses who swore to having seen him perform the last two miracles, which perhaps accounted for the balance being taken on trust. Possibly a more potent aid to his influence on this occasion was the fact that he brought with him a useful contri-

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bution in the shape of three or four camel-loads of ammunition and two small guns carried on camels.

Saiyid Mir Bashir made his appearance in Kohistan during the Ramazan, and at a big meeting held in the heart of the country his inflammatory preaching quickly set the passions of his audience ablaze. His rude but fiery eloquence naturally had the greatest effect on his younger hearers, and soon bore fruit. Two or three nights later, and Daudzai, a small village a few miles within our borders, was lighting the darkness with the red glare of its burning houses. It was but the beginning of a series of outrages. A few nights after it was the turn of Chappar, next of Murghaband, and in spite of every effort on the part of the local Militia and of the Border Police, the raiders invariably got safe away.

The Warden of the Marches—in other words the Commissioner of Pathanshahr, the Frontier district bordering on Kohistan—was Sir Joseph Baugh, a strong man and in ordinary times of great influence with the Border tribes. He had been a soldier before entering the Political Department, as have been and are so many of our most successful administrators. Unwilling to make too much of what might be after all only a playful, though an annoying, ebullition of animal spirits on the part of a few hot-headed and uncontrollable youngsters, and since, though there had been much damage to property, there had hitherto been no loss of life, he summoned a jirgah of the Khwaja Khels to meet him at Buland Kila. This was a small fort and village garrisoned by fifty rifles and twenty sabres found from Pathanshahr, which was only some fifteen miles away as the crow flies. The tribes had not quite made up their minds to openly flout the British Government, so about a dozen representative Maliks obeyed his summons. To them Sir Joseph issued his

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orders. Raids must cease; certain named ringleaders must be handed over to be dealt with by English law; and a fine of Rs. 5000 was to be paid within the next ten days. Otherwise Kohistan would be blockaded, and every Trans-Frontier Khwaja Khel found on our side of the Border would be placed in jail until the tribe made full submission. At the same time he advised them to insist on the return of Saiyid Mir Bashir to Ghilzaistan, lest through listening to his evil counsels worse should befall them. Requiring a prompt acquiescence to these terms within the week, Sir Joseph dismissed the Maliks to their homes and himself returned to Pathanshahr.

Shalozai is an important village with about a couple of thousand inhabitants, chiefly Cis-Border Pathans, but mixed with a fair sprinkling of Sikhs and Hindus. It is situated on an arm of the Shamil River, and is perhaps ten miles from the border of Kohistan in a straight line and about equi-distant from Pathanshahr. It is protected by a high loopholed wall, with a banquette on the inner side, and is provided with bastions to give flanking defence. The Shamil washes the western wall and is spanned by a boat-bridge, from which a metalled road leads to Pathanshahr through an avenue of fine trees. On the other three sides the ground is entirely open, though for some weeks in the autumn before the crops are cut these grow to within a few yards of the walls, merely a roadway, fifteen feet wide at the most, being left along the base. The walls themselves, though they look imposing from a distance, are rather crumbly in parts, and it would not require much time or effort to undermine them in selected spots. They are pierced on each face by high gateways wide enough to admit wheeled traffic. These gateways are curved outwards and so form bastions in themselves, for the banquette is carried above the gates, which are

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made of stout planking reinforced with iron bars and studs, and are also loopholed. Generally speaking, the guardianship of a village of this description is entrusted to a dozen or so chowkidars, armed for the most part with old and nearly worn-out Snider carbines or single-barrelled shotguns of equally antique pattern, whilst the chowkidars themselves are very often almost as antique as their weapons. Possibly some of the more important of the residents may have firearms of a later date, especially revolvers and automatic pistols ; but the number of these weapons is limited. The fact of the matter is, that the villagers rely on the British Government for protection, and are encouraged to do so ; and while it may be said that their confidence is usually not misplaced, accidents sometimes do happen.

It was a night or two after the interview between the Commissioner and the Khwaja Khel jirgah, which had taken place towards the middle of August. The moon was in its last quarter, and the nights, though starlit, were very dark. Din Mahomed, chowkidar, yawned audibly as he gazed over the wall into the blackness. He had kept awake on his post for at least half an hour, and felt he had done all which could reasonably be expected of him ; so having selected a soft spot in an angle of the wall, he went peacefully to sleep. Silence profound, broken only by the distant barking of a dog or the melancholy howl of a jackal, brooded over Shalozai and the surrounding country. Only, had there been anyone to watch, it would seem there is a curious agitation in the tall crop of millet growing close up to the north wall of the village. Not the faintest breeze is stirring, for it is one of those breathless nights that are the terror of a Punjab hot weather. The movement in the millet has ceased, but some half a dozen shadowy forms have flitted

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ghost-wise across the road, and a careful listener might hear the sound of iron scraping on mud at a point where a fall of material has left a wide cavity, some six to nine inches deep, near the foot of the wall. Half an hour passes and the depth of the cavity is perceptibly increased, as has also the size. Suddenly on the inside of the wall a prowling village dog on the search for garbage pauses a moment with one forefoot raised, and then gives tongue with a sharp yapping yelp, which instantly elicits response from half a dozen curs near by. Din Mahomed wakes with a sleepy curse, and rising to his feet breaks off a lump of mud from the parapet to throw at the brute which had disturbed his slumbers. It is his last act, for a shot rings out from the edge of the millet, and throwing up his arms he falls from the banquette into the street beneath. As he falls the point of a pickaxe is driven through the wall and the hole is rapidly but no longer silently enlarged. The need for silence has gone by. Several more men rush out from the crops and eagerly assist in the work; but the earthen wall, though in bad repair, is still tough, and some minutes must elapse before the hole is large enough to admit of their entrance. Inside the village meanwhile the noise is indescribable. The shrill cries of women and children, mixed with the hoarser shouts of men, the barking of dogs and the tramp of hurried feet, create a deafening medley of sounds; whilst, added to these, the chowkidars are running hither and thither and firing at random over the walls at anything or nothing, as a mark presents itself to their excited fancy. All is disorder, and no one knows where to go or what has happened.

At last one of the chowkidars, rushing aimlessly through the street, stumbles over the body of his slain companion. He thinks his last hour has come and announces the fact

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at the top of his voice, but none the less shouts lustily for assistance, and his frenzied cries reach the ears of two men, Khan Amaldin and Shah Mard Khan, who have kept their heads. They are Khans, uncle and nephew, of good family from Mallozai, a neighbouring village, and happen to be armed with Mauser pistols. They dash towards the shrieking chowkidar, and, realising the situation at a glance, immediately make their way to the banquette. Taking the greatest care not to expose themselves above the parapet, they creep into an adjoining bastion. Here, cautiously reconnoitring from a loophole, they make out a black mass at the foot of the wall perhaps fifty yards away, and on this they open fire with their pistols. Loud cries, mixed with a string of hearty curses, tell them that some at least of their shots have taken effect; but they have little time for observation, for a shower of bullets bury themselves in the wall around their loopholes, or sing through the air above their heads. Now, too, the clamour in the street redoubles, for the raiders have completed the breach and are pouring into the village. An angry glare begins to throw its baleful light upon the scene, showing that some of the houses have been fired, and the two Khans begin to find the bastion where they are crouching is becoming unpleasantly lighted up. The elder, Amaldin, who had, as it happened, served in one of our cavalry regiments, and knew the value of a timely retreat, growls to his nephew that they must be off if they wish to save their lives. So keeping in the shadow the two thread their way along the wall and up into a side street hoping to organise some sort of defence in another part of the village. By this time the houses in the northern quarter are well alight, and to the other noises are added the roar of the flames and the crash of falling beams, as roofs collapse, throwing up lurid columns of red sparks

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and long streaming tongues of orange flame. The raiding party increase the din, as they beat in the doors and shutters of the houses they are pillaging, and break open the padlocked chests of the fat bunniahs, whose money-bags are their principal objective. The delay caused by this search for plunder enables Shah Mard Khan and his uncle to reach a big house facing down the main street, along which the robbers are making their way. This house, which belonged to the headman of the village, Malik Usman Khusrogi, was one of the few masonry buildings in the place, and possessed a battlemented roof. It stood in a street which crossed the main road like the stroke of a capital 'T,' and was a bit higher than its neighbours.

Malik Usman Khusrogi was an old man, who had lost much of the energy which had characterised him in days gone by, and was now somewhat decrepit. Still he had lost none of his courage, and had no intention of submitting tamely to be robbed, or of allowing his womenfolk to be maltreated. He welcomed Amaldin and his nephew gladly, handing over to the elder Khan the direction of the defence, which was hastily organised with the assistance of half a dozen men the pair had collected on their way. After strongly barricading the entrance, the party mounted to the roof, and, crouching behind the parapet, they reserved their fire till a group of the raiders were collected within fairly easy pistol range, and were lit up by the blazing houses which marked their track. Then on a given signal their weapons rang out, taking the robbers completely by surprise, as beyond the few shots fired from the banquette there had been practically no opposition. The raiders reeled, and obeying their first impulse retired a few steps and attempted to take cover and reply to the fire. Their leader, however, quickly

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recognising the fact that the garrison of the house were too well protected to suffer from his return fire, and feeling that his men had about as much plunder as they could conveniently carry, if their withdrawal were not to be seriously impeded, gave the signal to retire. The retreat was covered by a dozen men, who kept up a hot fusilade on the keep, for such the house had proved itself to be. At length a shrill whistle sounded from the direction of the northern wall, and the rearguard decamped rapidly and simultaneously, being lost in the crops outside the village before the Khans could make their way out of the house and organise a pursuit.

The raiders had carried off most of their wounded with them, but two of the rearguard were found who, badly hit, had fallen exhausted near the breach and had been unobserved by their companions in their hasty flight. Some of the villagers, angered by their losses and ruined homes, to say nothing of rough handling, were for giving them short shrift, and wished to dispatch them out of hand. The Khans, however, withstood them, not, I fear, from any instincts of mercy, but because they hoped to extract information from them which might prove useful to the Commissioner, and because they knew their fate, though delayed, was surely sealed. The prisoners were secured, none too tenderly, and carried into a lower room in the keep, where they were recognised as Khwaja Khels, thus leaving no doubt, if any had previously existed, as to the perpetrators of the raid. In spite of promises and also of certain delicate methods of inquiry well known in the East, which correspond only too well with the 'Question' as known in the British Isles three hundred years ago, they maintained an obstinate silence, refusing to answer anything asked of them. After many vain efforts to obtain the names of their confederates,

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or at least of their leader, or a clue as to the direction from which the band had come, Khan Amaldin ordered them to be placed in an inner room of which he kept the key, and posted a guard over the only door before retiring to snatch a short rest.

Slowly the glare of the burning houses faded out of the sky, and the clamour and lamentations of the villagers died away, though at intervals through the silence of the night rose shrill cries of mourning. These were wrung from bereaved widows and mothers, for about fifteen or twenty men had been killed or wounded by the raiders. A pallid crescent came up out of the east, its wan beams lighting up the still smoking ruins and the havoc wrought by the robbers, and disclosing in places black ominous patches where the life-blood of some unfortunate had ebbed away. Here and there the silent-footed, shadowy forms of the village dogs flitted in and out amongst the ruins. Now one would pause to sniff at the stains in the roadway, or again would gingerly sidle up to some still stretched-out form that had not yet been picked up and stand poised above it, ready to dart aside at the slightest movement or to snarl defiance at any of his kind that approached to dispute his horrid banquet. After a while the wailing keen of the mourners ceased, and the peaceful light of the moonbeams shining down on the stillness which had fallen over the village formed a curious contrast to the lurid baleful glare and the clamant riot that had marked the earlier part of the night.

Messengers were sent into Pathanshahr soon after dawn broke to convey information of the raid, and the villagers spread over the surrounding country trying to pick up the trail of the robbers, or to recover any plunder that might have been dropped by them in their flight. For a time the trail was easy to follow, as whilst the majority

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of the band were pillaging the village a portion had looted the cattle byres and had driven off a couple of hundred head of cows and buffaloes. The tracks led straight towards the hills, but after following them up for a short distance the villagers abandoned the task, which they had known from the first was hopeless, for the Khwaja Khels had had too long a start. If, however, they could not recover their cattle, they did not return entirely empty-handed, for they came upon a wounded man hidden in a field, whom they brought in and confined with their other prisoners. A few hours later orders reached the village that these prisoners were not to be sent into Pathanshahr, as the Commissioner himself was coming out to Shalozai, and would personally conduct an inquiry into the occurrence on the spot.

About midday, preceded by an escort of mounted Border Police, Sir Joseph arrived. He was met at the boat-bridge by a deputation of the village elders, headed by old Usman Khusrogi, who was accompanied by the two Mallozai Khans. Having inspected the ruined portion of the village, and heard the story of the assault and the defence, the Commissioner walked over to the Malik's house, and the three prisoners were produced before him. The proceedings are short. Evidence having been given as to the circumstances under which they had been captured, they are asked if they wish to say anything. Two of the men preserve a sullen silence, merely scowling fiercely at their captors and their judge. The third, however, who is the one who was caught in the fields outside the village, makes a long, rambling, plausible statement to the effect that he is a poor man and had been journeying quietly on his business to visit his brother in a village called Talai some two miles away. He had fallen in with the raiders in their retreat from Shalozai,

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and they had incontinently shot him lest he should put the pursuit on their track. Here a police inspector whispers a few words in the ear of the Superintendent of Police, who had accompanied Sir Joseph. The Superintendent steps forward and mentions that the man is Gul Baz, a Khwaja Khel and a noted bad character, who can be identified by half a dozen of his sowars if necessary. Sir Joseph remarks drily that evidence as to character is quite superfluous. He then turns to the prisoner and tells him that he is obviously unfortunate, but that it is his own fault for having timed his visit so badly, and that he will have to pay the penalty for keeping such late hours. Having said this, he orders the three men to be taken out and hung on a big tree close to the spot where the raiders had broken their way through the village wall. The sentence is at once put into execution, Gul Baz protesting his innocence up to the moment that the rope is round his neck. As the noose tightens his demeanour changes, and he launches a bitter curse at the Commissioner, who listens impassive and unmoved. Justice having been done, Sir Joseph shakes hands with the Mallozai Khans and congratulates them both on their cool and gallant behaviour. Having added a few similar words to Usman Khusrogi and the village elders upon the successful defence, he returns to Pathanshahr and issues the necessary orders for a strict blockade of the Kohistan country, and for the immediate arrest of any Trans-Frontier Khwaja Khel caught on our side of the Border. The net result of these orders is that within the next few days two or three score of the tribesmen are rounded up and receive free lodging in jail.

Shortly after the above events, information was brought in to the authorities, through the medium of the Mallozai Khans, that the Khwaja Khel raiders had spent the day

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before their attack on Shalozai at two big villages, Jalandar and Jani Kot, which lie just inside our Administrative Border, and that some at least of the villagers had actually taken part in the outrage. Both these villages were entirely occupied by Khwaja Khels or their blood relations, and though within the Border line, can scarcely be said to be governed by us. Perhaps by a stretch of imagination their inhabitants, being within our sphere of influence, might be described as slightly biassed by our Political Agent. The Commissioner now decided that the two villages should be razed to the ground and the inhabitants expelled from our territory. This was to serve as a warning of the indiscretion and inadvisability of sheltering or assisting Border hotheads when engaged in pastimes of the kind described.

Three squadrons of cavalry with a battery of field artillery were given secret and urgent instructions to be ready to move at midnight, the whole in Field Service Order, and a hundred rifles of the Militia together with a hundred men of the Border Police got orders to march directly it was dusk, and, moving with the utmost secrecy, to rendezvous at a point a couple of miles south of Jalandar at 3 A.M., where they would receive further orders. Sir Joseph informed the cavalry commander confidentially of his intention of accompanying the troops, and insisted on the need for absolute secrecy. Punctually at midnight the column started, and every care having been taken to avoid the jingling of chains or the rattling of scabbards, there was no sound save the rumble of the gun wheels. Even this was muffled and faint, as the column kept to the side of the road, which was carpeted with a thick layer of dust. Mile after mile flitted by, and shortly before three o'clock the rendezvous was reached, the infantry (viz., the Militia and Police) having arrived a short while before.

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The Commissioner now gave orders for the infantry to occupy certain points on the foothills on the north side of the doomed villages, both so as to prevent any assistance coming down from Kohistan, and also to intercept any fugitives, as he wished to arrest participants in the raid on Shalozai. The infantry were to be in position by half-past four. The guns were ordered to come into action so as to be in readiness to shell the villages if required, but more with a view of overawing the inhabitants and impressing on them the futility of resistance. As soon as it was light the cavalry were to draw a cordon round the villages, whilst thirty of the police, retained for the purpose, were to move in and arrest the men wanted. Any man resisting was to be shot down, as also were fugitives attempting to escape across the Border.

The force got into position without any hitch or mishap, and as soon as it was light and the cavalry had taken up their places, the police entered the villages to secure their men. There was an angry buzz as from an overturned hive of bees, but when the inhabitants realised the preparations made for their undoing, and especially the hard fact of the guns in action and trained on their homes, they submitted with sullen resignation. One man drew a knife, but before he could use it he was lying with a bullet through his brain, and the example sufficed. Men, women and children were collected in a field between the two villages, where the Political Agent read out to them the orders of the Commissioner. Preparations were now made to loot and burn the villages systematically. Between four and five hundred head of cattle and sheep were collected and sent off to Pathanshahr under a cavalry guard, and then a couple of squadrons were dismounted and told off to enter the houses and to collect anything of value to be loaded on to the village carts. Two hours

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were allotted for this, and the men thoroughly enjoyed the work. Stalwart Sikh and Mahomedan troopers were to be seen rushing about, tripping over their spurs and colliding with each other, as they hunted squawking and frightened fowls in and out through the houses and streets. Household utensils, jezails, knives, cooking pots and tulwars were collected and piled in a jumbled mass on the carts. Hidden stores of grain, money and even rough jewellery, such as silver anklets and bangles, were unearthed and similarly treated, while articles too bulky or valueless to be carried away, such as ploughs or harrows, were piled into a heap for burning. At the end of the two hours the houses had been completely gutted of their contents, and kerosene oil was now poured over the roofs and over all inflammable articles. At the same time armfuls of straw and dried chaff were also piled up to assist the flames in catching readily. In the meantime three or four solidly built towers had been prepared for demolition by an Engineer officer who had accompanied the column, and all being in readiness, the fuses were fired. The towers seemed to rise bodily into the air, there was a loud explosion and they settled down again shapeless masses of stones and dust. These having been satisfactorily disposed of, a light was set to the bhoosa-stacks in the surrounding fields, and soon they were blazing merrily. Men now went into the villages from the leeward side, and fired each house as they came through. A fairly strong wind was blowing, and it was obvious that, given half an hour, there would be no saving any portion of either place.

As the flames roared up to the heavens, and a canopy of smoke obscured the sun, a few dropping shots were heard coming from the foothills where the covering-party of Militia and Police were posted. Sir Joseph had no desire for the troops to be drawn into an engagement,

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so issued orders for the covering-party to fall back on the cavalry, a squadron having taken up a position in rear of the infantry to help them in case of trouble. The Khwaja Khels, who all this time had been kept under guard to watch the destruction of their homes, were now despatched, escorted by a squadron, towards the Frontier, to go where they pleased beyond our borders. By the time this squadron returned the infantry were well clear of the foot-hills, so the column re-formed. The prisoners, to the number of five-and-twenty, were handed over to the charge of the police, and, leaving a detachment to form a rear-guard, the force started on its return march. The men were in high spirits, and more than one of the sowars had a chicken or two hanging from his saddle-bow, or a brass pot, or some other small article that had taken his fancy; so the squadrons presented a somewhat unusual appearance for our Indian cavalry. By order of the Commissioner, a large number of ekhas and tum-tums had been impressed in the Pathanshahr bazaar as soon as it was daylight, and sent out to meet the column to save the infantry the weary march back, and with them came a small body of mounted police to take over the prisoners. The operations had been carried out entirely successfully and without a casualty on our side, whilst the punishment inflicted had been exemplary, as it was calculated that the financial loss to the Khwaja Khels exceeded Rs. 10,000.

II. ORDEAL BY BATTLE.

"But war's the Borderer's game."
—*Marmion.*

The lesson inflicted upon the Khwaja Khels proved a direct discouragement so far as small pin-pricking raids were concerned, but the tribes were by no means done

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with yet. Perhaps the events of the next few weeks have no exact historical parallel in the annals of the 'Debateable Land,' though its list of battles is a long one, and in that respect is at one with the history of the North-West Frontier. However that may be, the Warden of our Indian Marches had cause enough for disquiet. Saiyid Mir Bashir was still working upon the passions of his co-religionists in Kohistan with his sermons, which had become more inflammatory than ever, and several of the other clans had been induced to throw in their lot with the Khwaja Khels, till practically all sections of the country had enlisted under the Fakir's banner. At length it was decided that the Id, the big feast which marks the conclusion of the long Ramazan fast, should be celebrated by a blow struck for Islam in an attack on British India. The immediate objective was to be the fort and village of Buland Kila. Fortunately the British authorities, by means of their secret agents, had been able to keep their fingers on the pulse of the movement, and were fully aware of the growing unrest and of its aggravation by the Fakir, a fact which the Commissioner had clearly indicated in his warning to the Khwaja Khel Maliks. The resolution adopted in this instance was known by Sir Joseph within a few hours, with the result that further dealings with Kohistan passed into the hands of the military authorities. A careful calculation showed that it would not be possible for the tribesmen to assemble within striking distance of Buland Kila in under a week, but nevertheless the bugles rang out the 'Alarm,' and in less than six hours from the receipt of the news, the Movable Column, always held in readiness for such emergencies, was marching out of cantonments. It consisted of two squadrons of cavalry, a section of field artillery, a mountain battery, a company of sappers

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and miners and a brigade of infantry, in all rather under 3500 men.

The column had orders to entrench a camp at Janakhwar, which commands two of the main passes leading out of Kohistan, and is roughly three miles from Buland Kila. It was not intended to enter Kohistan, but merely to prevent the tribesmen from trespassing within our borders. The force, having bivouacked for a few hours on the road, reached its destination soon after noon on the following day, and a perimeter camp was formed, and, to break up a rush, an apron of barbed wire placed around it rather under a hundred yards from the crest-line of the parapet. To the north of the camp the ground was open, though covered with a low scrub, right up to the hills a mile and a half or more away. On the west, at a distance of about a thousand yards there was a big village called Kikarai, nominally friendly, from which a fairly wide canal with very soft muddy bottom ran towards the hills and turned off westwards along their base. Just at the bend was the small village of Kazhakai, surrounded by high crops which also extended for miles along the western bank of the canal. There were, too, high crops within a couple of hundred yards of the south-west corner of the camp, which for safety had to be cleared for some distance back. At the south-east corner there was a graveyard rather less than five hundred yards distant, whilst along the east face ran a nullah mostly dry, which led down from the Kohistan foothills where it had its source.

For a day or two all was quiet, and the leisure was employed by the troops in strengthening the defences of the camp, placing obstacles and fougasses, trip-wires connecting with flares, &c. The chief component of these flares is a test tube of very thin glass filled with an acid

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round which straw or chaff is heaped. The wire connecting with the tube is looped and slipped over the end in such a way that a very slight pressure is sufficient to break the glass and release the acid, which coming in contact with a special material, bursts into a bright flame. The first night after the flares had been set, the force had turned in dead tired after a long day's work, when a brilliant light suddenly shone up on the north side of the camp. The inlying pickets at once stood to arms, and shortly afterwards there was a crackle of musketry from the perimeter, which turned out the remainder of the men. The firing lasted a very short time, and as there were no further developments the troops were dismissed. Visions of spies, or a band of Ghazia creeping up to surprise the camp under cover of the darkness, but foiled by our vigilance, were before everybody's eyes. Next morning the carcase of a village dog with a bullet through its body disclosed the nature of the nocturnal visitor.

Whilst the infantry looked after the defences of the camp, the cavalry reconnoitred morning and evening into the Kohistan foothills. The authorities hoped that the Kohistanis, seeing we were prepared, would decide not to try conclusions with us ; but as daily reports were brought in, giving news of fresh accessions to their strength, another infantry brigade was brought out to Buland Kila, which entrenched itself on the glacis of the fort, whilst a weak cavalry brigade was ordered out to a central position in rear of the infantry. Soon after the arrival of these reinforcements the cavalry patrols were fired on, but as only one sowar was wounded practically no damage was done, and the next morning the cavalry had their revenge. One of their scouts brought in news to the officer commanding the machine-gun section that a group of

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the enemy numbering about a hundred was in a nullah visible from a small ridge about half a mile in front. As far as could be seen they had put no sentries out and were quite unconscious of the proximity of our cavalry, being in fact engaged in preparing breakfast. The machine-guns were cautiously brought up to the ridge, the gun detachments taking every precaution against showing themselves. The range-finders gave the range as fourteen hundred yards, after checking with the utmost care, and the guns were very deliberately trained on the unsuspecting foe. The British officer commanding the section made sure of the sighting of each gun, and then, focussing his field-glasses on his target, gave the signal. It might have been a bombshell bursting among the cooking pots. For a few seconds the Kohistanis were too taken aback to move, but in less than half a minute there was not a sign of them save for half a dozen or more bodies which lay beside the fire. They would never move again. The cavalry returned to camp, each man wearing the satisfied smile of the famous tiger.

This little incident seemed to have irritated the enemy, as that evening about eight o'clock the darkness of the night was lit up by a series of flashes around the camp, and the rattle of musketry, accompanied by the whiz and thud of bullets, roused the brigade to arms. For a time the firing was quite heavy, especially from the graveyard to the south of the camp, where a strong body of the enemy had ensconced themselves in the shelter afforded by the graves. Their bullets missing the south parapet caused a good deal of annoyance to the men lining the north face of the camp, and gave them reason to congratulate themselves on the fact that they had that day completed a parados the full length of that side. Away in the distance a bugle could be heard sounding

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what was evidently meant for the 'Charge.' There was a lot of loud shouting, some of it abuse of the British troops and the rest obviously intended to rouse the courage of the tribesmen to sticking-point for an assault. It was all to no purpose though, for they could not harden their hearts sufficiently to face the cold steel they knew was awaiting them in the darkness, close behind the shadowy black line which was all that indicated the entrenchment, and after half an hour or so the noise died away and silence reigned again. An episode which created some amusement was one which occurred in the midst of the heaviest fire. A driver of the transport corps, awakened by the shots, sprang from his blankets, and seizing a waterproof sheet wrapped it round his head and shoulders and fled towards the mule lines. No one could quite make out his object in thus enshrouding himself, but apparently he thought that what would protect him against celestial rain would be equally efficacious against earthly bullets, and perhaps he had had dealings with some magician in the same line of business as Saiyid Mir Bashir. Except to one or two mules and a cavalry horse, no damage had been done inside the camp, although the enemy repeated this little treat a couple of times more the same night for our benefit. On the other hand, the next morning two or three blood trails just beyond the barbed wire showed that our assailants had not escaped scathless from our return fire.

News was now coming in daily that big contingents of the enemy were converging on Isham, a village in the hills near the head of the nullah forming the eastern boundary of the camp, whilst along the crest of the foothills facing our northern parapet numerous figures could be seen busily engaged in building sangars. They were not molested, as the British authorities were now quite

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as anxious for a fight as the Kohistanis. They wanted the latter to collect, that the lesson might be the more severe and far-reaching, since it was obvious that the tribes were bent on trouble. During the firing on the previous night the hill-tops of Kohistan had been blazing with signal fires. From every range in sight the red flames had pierced the darkness, each betokening a contingent on the march, so that it was probable there would be no long delay before matters came to a head. Still the day passed quietly, except that the cavalry patrols were again shot at. About 10 P.M. there was a repetition of the previous night's entertainment, though from a more respectful distance ; and on this occasion the troops scarcely bothered to reply, as it was considered a waste of ammunition. There was one exception to this. In the middle of the earlier performance a light had been noticed in Kikarai village, flashing and disappearing in a way which was suspiciously like signalling, and a half company had been told off specially to watch the village, with sights carefully adjusted. The light appeared, and immediately there was the crash of a volley, followed closely by a couple more, after which signalling was apparently an unpopular amusement.

The next evening orders were issued that the brigade, leaving a couple of hundred men to guard the camp, was to be in readiness to move out at 8 A.M. the following morning to seize and occupy the foothills, whilst the brigade from Buland Kila would co-operate. Four squadrons of cavalry were to watch the left flank, the remainder the approaches to Buland Kila from the north, and the artillery were to be massed in a central position to cover the advance. The troops welcomed these orders with the keenest delight, as camp life, with the thermometer at 120° in the shade, had already begun to pall,

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and a brush with the enemy would be a pleasing diversion. Rumour in the camp had it that the Kohistanis had assembled between fifteen and twenty thousand men, but this was probably a good deal exaggerated. Still there seemed every prospect of quite a good fight.

It was a hot, cloudless morning as the regiments moved out of camp and formed up on their brigade markers. Facing were the low foothills known to them as the Pebble Ridge, culminating in a sharp pyramid-shaped hill named The Peak, overlooking the big nullah which ran past the camp. Behind rose the hills of Kohistan, barren, black and forbidding. The Pebble Ridge was formed by a series of long, bare, stony mounds perhaps a hundred feet high, and to all appearances absolutely devoid of life. In one or two places scarcely perceptible black lines marked the position of the enemy's sangars; but there was not a sign, not the flutter of a rag, to show they were occupied, though the troops knew well that keen eyes were watching their every movement. The Janakhwar brigade had orders to occupy The Peak and the Pebble Ridge with three battalions, of which the right battalion was to be astride the nullah in order to link up with the troops advancing from Buland Kila, the fourth battalion being in reserve. The Brigadier rode up and received the reports, issued one or two last instructions, and the regiments, shaking themselves out into battle formation as they went, moved off.

Still for a few moments there was no sign from the low stony ridge which was the British objective; but before half the distance had been covered little spurts of dust sprang up among the advancing files. The plain, thick with dust after a long drought, looked as though big drops from a heavy thunder-shower were slowly falling on its surface, but an ominous 'whit, whit!' in

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the air betrayed that something more dangerous than rain was astir. As the first shots ricochetted through the lines with a vicious whir, two or three tribal standards were suddenly reared on the crest of the Pebble Ridge and on The Peak. The fire grew heavier, but the range was long and no damage was done. Grimly silent, the troops pressed on without a check. Suddenly from behind there rose a complaining shriek which tore through the air far overhead, and shortly after a thick black column started into being on the Pebble Ridge. The guns had begun to talk. Soon the air was wailing continuously as if in pain, and dark earth-spouts sprang up from the mounds in front till it seemed that the crest and near slopes of the Ridge had burst forth into geysers. High up, too, white fleecy clouds appeared looking harmless enough but for the red flash that was their birth-pang, and which told that they were belching forth a deadly hail of shrapnel bullets. A sharp continuous staccato bark like the rattle of a stick along a paling, only ten times as fast and loud, revealed that a machine-gun had come into action, and the trail of its bullets was shown by the little grey puff-balls that rose without cessation on and around a big sangar which crowned one of the mounds.

Meanwhile the regiment astride of the nullah was meeting with fairly serious opposition. Directly in its line of advance on the right of the ravine was a big graveyard, the headstones of which offered convenient ranging marks to the enemy. As the companies threaded their way between the graves, they came under a heavy converging fire from sangars on both sides of the ravine, at ranges varying between five and eight hundred yards, and men began to fall rapidly. In spite of this they pressed on towards a low ridge in their immediate front, but were temporarily checked on the far side of the graveyard,

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beyond which the ground rose gently in a glacis-like slope, absolutely devoid of cover. The check was but momentary, as on the right the pressure of the Buland Kila brigade was beginning to make itself felt on the enemy's flank, threatening to cut their line of retreat to the hills —a threat which no Eastern race, save only the Japanese, can contemplate with equanimity. On the left of the nullah a bright flash of steel at the foot of the Pebble Ridge showed that the regiments on that side had fixed bayonets, and shortly dancing points of light were flickering towards the crest. The pace quickened, as Englishman, Sikh and Pathan vied with each other in their efforts to be first to get to handgrips with the enemy.

Before that steady advance, however, the standards, which had been flaunting defiance in the breeze, were hastily lowered, and disappeared into folds of the ground. The Kohistanis melted away into the hills in rear literally, for, except for a stray figure of two, no one saw them go. Nor was their retirement by any means a rout, for they retreated with a sting in their tails, keeping up a hot fire from hidden points of vantage. They were skilfully carrying out the usual Pathan tactics of retiring before an attack, hoping to lure their foes into difficult ground in the hills, and looking forward to getting their turn in harrying the rearguard, or, as in this case, in following up the retirement on camp. The British General was, however, an old Frontier officer, accustomed to Pathans and well versed in their ways, and had no intention of being drawn a step farther than he wished. Having gained the Pebble Ridge, which was separated from the higher hills in rear by a deep ravine, he halted his force, while he allowed his guns to play on and search the slopes across the valley, much to the disgust of the Kohistanis, who did not consider this was at all playing the game.

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They had been particularly anxious to draw the British into the nullah beyond Pebble Ridge, as they had made arrangements for a cunning diversion. A large body of men was concealed partly in the crops on the western bank of the canal close to Kazhakai, and partly in a big depression from which a narrow gully led down from the hills near the spot where the canal bent off to the west. This force, estimated at three or four thousand, was under the command of a noted Malik—Daria Khan by name—who had accompanied Saiyid Mir Bashir from Ghilzaistan. The plan was that, as soon as the troops had been lured beyond the foothills, Malik Daria Khan was to sweep down on the camp with his men, plunder and burn it, and then, turning towards the hills again, take the brigade in rear. As the British refused to be drawn, this plan miscarried; but the camp proved a tempting bait. Malik Daria Khan either thought that there might be time to destroy it, calculating the force would be pinned to its ground by the tribesmen in its front, or, what is more likely, some of his men got out of hand, and a body of about a thousand issued from the depression.

On this flank four squadrons of cavalry had been standing dismounted by their horses, concealed under a spur of the hill and chafing at their inaction. A sharp order, and the men sprang to their saddles. Two squadrons were held back in reserve, but the remaining two wheeled into line at the trot and advanced into the plain. As they debouched the trumpets shrilled out some musical heart-stirring notes, maddening the horses, who well understood the meaning of that wild music, and the squadrons burst upon the eyes of the astonished tribesmen in the thrilling, glorious gallop of the charge. It is the one moment for which all cavalry soldiers live, when, as the glittering lance-points drop before the horses' chests,

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they sweep like a whirlwind down on the foe. Forward rushed the long line; the going was good, and there was nothing to stay them. Before their lance-points the Kohistanis were fleeing in a frenzied rush for safety. The squadrons were pressing on at top speed, and the inevitable disorder had broken up the line. Soon it was obvious that the charge had resolved itself into a race for the canal. Unfortunately the cavalry had miscalculated the distance, for the tribesmen reached the canal first and flung themselves across it, whilst the lancers found themselves hung up by an obstacle which proved too much for the majority of the horses. Some of the men, better mounted, were shot down from the edge of the crops as they put their horses at the jump, others as they tried to make their way through the water. Those few who did succeed in crossing found themselves in evil case, and had the greatest difficulty in eventually getting back, as the Kazhakai villagers had flooded the fields, and the troopers floundered in a sort of sticky morass, the mud being above the horses' fetlocks. Seeing the troops in trouble, another large body of the tribesmen poured out of the gully and set themselves to the congenial task of killing and cutting up the wounded. This was the opportunity of the two reserve squadrons, who, held back as they were, had sat watching with pent-up excitement and fury seething in their breasts. They were now unleashed, and whirled down at the gallop. The attention of the Kohistanis was so occupied by their bloodthirsty work that the troopers got well into the enemy before they were perceived, and amply avenged their fallen comrades. Many of the tribesmen were actually so absorbed in their ghoulish task that they never even heard the thunder of the charge till the lance-points were almost within their bodies. In one instance at least one of these

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brutes was seated on his victim, who was still alive, and was engaged in hacking off the poor wretch's fingers one by one when a lance took the cruel fiend in the back and he never even knew what had struck him. A battery of horse artillery, which had accompanied the cavalry, now opened with shrapnel on Kazhakai and the surrounding fields, and the enemy retired into the hills. After collecting the dead and wounded the cavalry withdrew out of range, but remained in the neighbourhood to discourage any further attempts on the camp.

All this while the infantry had lain out on the Pebble Ridge under a burning sun, the prevalent feeling being one of absolute boredom, as the enemy steadfastly declined to show himself. To the discomfort of the heat was added the fact that the ground was extremely hard and stony and was covered with prickly seeds. These bore a strong resemblance to miniature crow's-feet, those four-spiked obstacles which our engineering manuals tell us are so useful when placed in the bottom of a ford. For the benefit of the uninitiated I may mention that the spikes are about three inches long, and so arranged that however one of these instruments of torture is thrown down, a spike always points upwards, and is calculated to pierce and lame an unwary foot.

At half-past one orders were received by helio that the force would commence its retirement at two o'clock, and regimental reserves immediately took up a second line in prearranged covering positions, at the same time sending water and ammunition-mules to the rear clear of the foot-hills. Troops retiring before a Pathan enemy have no use for encumbrances. At two o'clock the first units of the advanced line began to fall back in small parties, the men taking the greatest care not to expose themselves, wriggling down flat on their stomachs till well below the crest-line,

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and then rising and getting away at top speed. The men to go were selected by name from all over the line, lest gaps should be left, and those who remained increased the rate of their fire, so that it would seem the position was still strongly held. This was in order to deceive the enemy and to prevent his suspecting that the retirement had begun.

Whilst this was going on a mountain battery, which had advanced on to the Peak directly it had been secured by the infantry, began to man-handle its guns down the slope of the hill. The gunners were only too thankful to get away, as the slopes of The Peak were steep, and had given them a deal of labour and trouble. Every time a gun had been fired it had recoiled some yards down the hill, in spite of the check afforded by drag-ropes, and had turned bodily over. It had to be turned right side up, and hauled up the slope again by the gun detachment, entailing exertion which, whilst it might have been pleasant enough on a cold day, was extremely distasteful under a burning sun, beating down relentlessly and radiating from the stony hill. By the time the battery had dismantled their guns and loaded them on the waiting mules, the enemy had perceived that the force was in retreat, and the nearer slopes of the Kohistan hills were alive with men. They came streaming across the intervening valley in thousands, as a crowd breaks into a football field when the referee blows the 'No Side' whistle. Standards danced down the rocky spurs, and the companies covering the retirement soon had their hands full. The Kohistanis paid most attention to the troops west of the big nullah, as they hoped, by making use of the cover it afforded, they would be able to cut into the flank of the battalion there. These hopes were doomed to disappointment, as four machine-guns had been placed in position 1500 yards

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back, to checkmate this very movement. As the leading tribesmen showed themselves in the nullah and on the eastern slope of The Peak, they came under a cross fire which drove them back into cover.

Several hundreds were now advancing up the northern slopes of the Pebble Ridge, but they too were stopped by the steady fire of the rearguard, although they got to within a hundred yards of the position held. All this time the men were being sent down with orders to take up another covering position to assist the retirement of the second line. Soon only a few scattered groups of men, specially selected for their activity and because they were good shots, were left out on the advanced line. These waited till their comrades were well clear, keeping up a smart fire on anybody they saw, and then, selecting their opportunity, raced away down the hill. At the same moment the second line opened rapid fire on the abandoned position, the guns also spraying it with shrapnel, to deny it to the enemy. The withdrawal of the second line was carried out in a similar manner, and the force was half a mile away in the plain, and free from all chance of entanglement, long before the tribesmen could establish themselves on Pebble Ridge.

The British casualties, all told, inclusive of the cavalry, were under three hundred; whilst from information which reached Pathanshahr through several separate and corroboratory channels, the Kohistanis lost more than treble that number in killed and wounded, including several influential Maliks, with nothing to show for it. In one instance, it is true, they scored off us. Before abandoning The Peak, the top of the hill had been mined, the fuse leading to the mine being taken back with the retiring troops and unwound as they went along. A sapper officer was in charge, who waited till the enemy began to

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swarm on to the hill, and when a large number had collected there, lit the fuse. Unfortunately this proved defective, probably owing to its length, which was several hundred yards, and the mine failed to explode. The tribesmen discovered the fuse, and following it up located the mine. This they leisurely dug up, removing the gunpowder with which it was charged, and carrying it off with them, afterwards sending in a grateful message of thanks for so opportune a gift. Still a thousand casualties was a fairly heavy price for 50 lb. of gunpowder, so that even the officer who had laid the mine, disgusted as he was that his little surprise had failed to come off, scarcely begrudged them their booty.

As a result of this fight the assembly of the Kohistanis melted away like snow under a hot sun. This was, no doubt, chiefly due to the Pathan custom of carrying off the dead for burial and the wounded to be cared for in their own villages, a custom which causes great difficulties in estimating casualties. It may be, too, they had had as much punishment as they cared for at the time, but, whatever the cause, they disappeared. The next morning the cavalry were all over Pebble Ridge, and even crossed the ravine and reconnoitred as far as the village of Isham, which they found deserted, without being in any way molested or seeing a soul. Even yet, however, the tribes refused to submit to our terms, so the blockade of the country was strictly enforced. Saiyid Mir Bashir remained in Kohistan, and did his utmost to work on the fanatical feelings of the tribesmen and to stir them up to another trial of strength. In this he was successful, for a month later they again came down to Isham in large numbers, or rather to the spot where the village had been, for two or three days after the fight the Janakhwar brigade had gone out one morning and blown the place up, without

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encountering any opposition. Still they encamped at the ruins, as it was the only spot where water was obtainable for miles. Once again cavalry patrols were fired upon and the camp sniped into at night. In a day or two, when their numbers had grown, the tribesmen became bolder, and even ventured down into the plain during daylight and attempted to follow up the infantry pickets, which always remained out from dawn till dusk about half a mile beyond the perimeter. On one afternoon they crept down into the big graveyard near the ravine, and fired into a company of infantry who were exercising in that direction, till it became obvious they would not be contented without another lesson.

The operations followed practically the same course as before, except that on this occasion the British artillery was even a good deal more in evidence, as two or three batteries were brought right up on to the Pebble Ridge, and the guns really did most of the work until the retirement began. This time the enemy tried following up the Buland Kila brigade, but with no more success—in fact, they came in for some rather rough handling—and the following morning, as before, not a Kohistani was in the vicinity. The enemy's losses were said to be, if anything, heavier than in the previous engagement, whilst those of the British were under a hundred.

The result of this last encounter rather sickened the tribesmen, and even the Fakir's most impassioned eloquence was impotent to collect them again. Indeed that firebrand found it convenient to retire to Ghilzaistan, as all sections in Kohistan, even the most anti-British, were beginning to look askance at him. His conjuring trick with the bullets had failed to come off, and though his reputation for sanctity, which really rested on as insecure a basis as his reputed miraculous powers, still protected

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him, he got a notion that absence of body was a more certain safeguard. He therefore announced that he was going to visit the shrine of a very sacred Pir which lay in the heart of a distant valley, but actually slipped away quietly in the direction of Amiribad. His reception there was likely to have been warm, for the Nawabs of Ghilzaistan have a short way with disobedient subjects, and Saiyid Mir Bashir could not plead even a success which might have justified his defiance of his ruler's orders. Fortunately for him, when he was still some distance from the capital, a friendly hint reached him of the state of the Nawab's temper and the probable nature of his welcome. He therefore turned aside and sought an asylum in a difficult part of the Badakshan country, where the Nawab's authority was more nominal than real.

His departure had removed the chief obstacle in the way of an understanding with the Kohistanis, whose jirgahs were shortly afterwards given a safe-conduct to Pathanshahr to interview the Commissioner, for the soldiers had done their part, and the management of affairs reverted to the civil authorities. The tribes were ordered to pay a heavy fine, to surrender a large number of rifles and to give up the ringleaders of the Shalozai and other raids to be tried by us. The alternative was the continuation of the blockade and the imprisonment of their compatriots who had been arrested in British territory. Three or four influential Maliks were required to surrender themselves as hostages, and the blockade, of course, would be unrelaxed till these terms had been entirely complied with, whilst our troops would remain out in readiness on the borders of their country. It was further hinted that in the event of too prolonged a delay in acceding to these conditions, the troops might enter the country and remain in occupation of the principal villages

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till still harsher conditions had been enforced. The jirgahs endeavoured to obtain some mitigation of these terms; but Sir Joseph was adamant, and permitted no discussion. It was a case of "Take it or leave it," and the Maliks unwillingly gave their assent. The hostages were selected from the members of the jirgahs, and the remainder withdrew sorrowfully to Kohistan to collect the fine and the arms. Even after this for some days the tribesmen, who are nothing if not democratic, and are by no means ruled, but merely, at the most, influenced by their Maliks, were inclined to shilly-shally. They wanted to send in another jirgah, but the Commissioner refused to receive it, and the stringency of the blockade, which had now been in force for nearly six weeks already, had begun to make itself felt. Such poor trade as they had with British India was entirely cut off, and even such a necessity of life as salt was growing scarce, and almost unobtainable. The clans could see no way out of the impasse except in submission to the orders of the Commissioner. Then, too, the heaviest losses in the fighting had fallen on the fiercer and more intractable members of the community, and the more cautious and moderate spirits now had a chance of making their voices heard. Consequently the irreconcilables were overruled, and a month later the money and the rifles were handed over at the fort at Pathanshahr, and three notorious bad characters, who had long been wanted by the police, were surrendered and safely lodged in the jail, to await the due reward of their misdeeds. Hostages and prisoners were released, the troops returned to cantonments and Peace once more temporarily settled down over that portion of the Border.

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II.

GOING NORTH

I.

In the clear mornings and evenings of the cold weather one can see the hills sixty miles away—a low purple web with white threads strung across the horizon like gossamer in hoar-frost, a magic web with some enchantment in it. The heaped mountain-chains behind it, one is told, deflect the surveyor's plummet; much more so the heart of man. I had a bare week for a journey, most of which I owed to the super-humanity of some old sage who ordained that fixed days in the year should be set apart for the needs of the spirit. I believe the personality of this good man is lost in the obscure mists of legend. His spiritual needs probably differed from mine, but I have no doubt he would have approved that I, an alien and unbeliever of a generation ten—or is it twenty?—centuries after his teaching, should by dint of it be drawn into the hills. A day and night each way had to be given to the train. Five hundred miles in all, and most of the day I spent looking out of the window, for the mountains were in sight nearly all the while. I left the base of the high ranges behind me. A friend in a post on the other side of the Khyber had given me the chance of spending three nights among the bare broken spurs that drop down into Afghanistan—moun-

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tains of no particular natural beauty, but invested with a human interest that appeals to Englishmen when they are tired of the forced air in which they live. I was glad to be for a day or two among men who pander to no weak-kneed gods.

One feels the difference in the air as the train speeds north—the difference in the air that makes the difference in men. It is a showery afternoon, and the slant sun throws a glow on the mustard-fields stretched like yellow scarfs across the red soil. The reflection of it burnishes the Siris and Shisham trees in their rufous winter garb of dried-up pod and leaf. The mountains loom a dull purple under the labouring clouds. A few miles north of Rawal Pindi we pass the point where Nicholson's gaunt monument guards the Pass, as if he still held the breach against the tribesmen. North of this it is the soldier who counts.

Between Lawrencepur and Campbellpur we enter a wide rolling plain, soft underfoot, with just the undulations a cavalryman loves. The talk in the carriage is of manœuvres, the race for a hill or a bridge, the iniquity of umpires. It is here in the North that our best leaders of men have left their names. Jacobabad, Edwardesabad, Fort Sandeman, Lawrencepur—strange uneuphonious patronymics, alien to the soil. If we can stomach them, it is because our love for the men who bore them is great. Perhaps this is the only strip of Asia where the English place-name is not a profanation. Deep under the soil lie buried Buddhist cities, Taxila and the capitals of Gandhara; but the North-West Frontier is primarily a battlefield. Cities that are not buried are destroyed; the land has no ancient shrines. But the brave ghosts who stride these fields and live in the people's mind, as well as in our own, are Englishmen. And their names

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survive fitly, for they were gods to the men they led and inspired in battle. One of them at least has become an *avatar*, and the faithful scatter flowers on his altar and place lighted wicks in the niches of his shrine.

At Attock we cross the Indus, where the stream frets through a gorge no wider than its pent-up channel in Chilas. I had expected a broad free stream, but the river strains along here as there. Seven hundred miles to the north, under the bold scarp of Nanga Parbat, I had followed the stream by moonlight, listening to its burden and thinking of it as soon to be free. Now through the rattle of the train over the girders I imagined that I could hear the same undersong, only angrier and more insistent, the voice of a river long baulked of its freedom. The fort above it looks like a natural excrescence. One cannot think of the brown rocky hill over the river without battlements. Bastions just like these must have frowned down on Alexander: the stone-age man must have made the rock his citadel.

One can imagine that care and the consciousness of files in pigeon-holes sits lightly on the shoulders of that young officer riding at the head of his battery into the gates of the fort. As one goes north one is carried back into the past; every fifty miles is a decade towards individualism. At Peshawur a man is almost completely a man. In the Kurram or the Khyber the fire might still burn in a Nicholson, unquenched even in times of peace. One is still at the end of the telegraph poles, but every hundred miles of wire the coil is thinner, the current weaker; the voice of the Blue Funk School scarcely filters through. The 'brass-hats' at Simla and Delhi are considerate—up to a point.

At Akola Khattak the verandah pillars of the station are sangared; there is a guard on the train. The tribes-

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men have had the impudence to fire into the blockhouse by Attock Bridge. Five weeks ago the Sangu Khels came down and looted the Calcutta mail at Jahangira Road, thirty-five miles from Peshawur. Two nights afterwards they raided Khairabad, the next station, and carried off the Hindu assistant station-master on ransom into the hills. The man was valued at Rs. 1300, and the money paid. Holding up the train was a new move on the part of the tribesmen. A Pathan wandering in Peshawur city had been drawn into a cinematograph booth and seen an American train looted. This gave him 'the brain-wave,' as my friend said. Otherwise he was unspoilt by Western education.

At Rawal Pindi I heard that an officer had been shot in Wana Fort the day before. Friends of mine in his regiment got into the train; they were going to his funeral at Mardan the next morning. There had been a Khattak dance in the fort, a kind of 'send-off' to a Subadar who was going on pension. The young recruit was lying by his loaded rifle, as they do on this frontier, when he got up and shot his officer through the back at three yards; then he took cover and fired at the unarmed havildar who closed with him. He said he was sorry; he did not mean to do it, and did not know why he did. He was excited by the music; the pipes got to his head. It is believed now that he was under the influence of a mullah, and that he enlisted to become a *ghazi*, to enter Paradise by the click of a trigger; but he did not speak of these visions. A few months in the regiment might have moulded him otherwise—he was of plastic stuff—but the pipes awoke the fanatic in him, sent a drop of blood to his head. Justice was summary. The Political arrived at Wana the next day at two; he was tried at three and hanged at four.

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One feels that the best men get shaken up to the top of the map, or if they are not the best they soon become assimilated to the type. Everyone told me that the murdered man was of the very best. My friend Graeme, with whom I was going to stay beyond the Khyber, went to his funeral, so I had a day to spend in Peshawur. In the afternoon I drove round the city, a clean, dry, grey and brown city of caked mud, very compact within its walls. Many of the stalwarts one sees in the bazaars are freebooters from over the border. They will return enriched, perhaps deviously by night threading the pickets at the foot of the hills; or they will leave rifle and loot buried somewhere until they come for it again, and return unarmed, though not innocent-looking, driving the donkeys back that have carried wood into the bazaar. It is an intriguing mysterious city, with its full complement of robbers, secret police and cosmopolitan adventurers.

On Monday my friend returned, and we started off to Landi Kotal. On the plain outside Peshawur I tried to shed my civil slough. Every squadron, company, or battery we met impressed me more and more with the fact that a soldier's is the most consistently clean and thorough work that is done. My own 'show' had seemed a particularly peddling and finnicking business during the last few weeks, and I put the thought of it from me with distaste. I believe I felt something of the contempt for myself and others of civil caste and occupation that the Pathan feels for the Hindu shopkeeper of his village, that poor necessary drudge who is allowed to go about unharmed so long as he wears the red-striped trousers, badge of his race, which protect him, like a woman's garment, from lead and steel. We met a squadron of the 1st Bengal Lancers exercising, two companies of the 51st Sikhs on reconnaissance, a battery of Field Artillery

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galloping across the boulders and broken banks of a dead river-bed, one section supporting another as they fought a rearguard action ; and at Jamrud the young remounts of the Khyber Rifles were learning to face ' sights and sounds,' nosing a traction-engine or a ' stink-bike,' sliding down shale slopes, making the acquaintance of everything new, or loud, or bright, or hideously discordant with a decent horse's idea of the fitness of things.

Jamrud lies at the foot of the Pass. I will not write about the Khyber ; it has been too often described for me to describe it. I can imagine the gorge rising at the epithets heaped upon it. The little mosque of Ali Masjid, by the patch of corn and willows, no bigger than a shepherd's hut, has become a name as often on men's lips as busy capitals. Let the faithful tie their red flag or tattered garment to the thorn-bush by the shrine. The cairn is high enough ; I will not fling another adjective or stone.

Besides, these hills are not unique, though the importance of them is. I have seen their like in many lands. Mountains in dry countries are always bare, broken, verdureless, ravine-bitten, strategically a nexus of ambushes, crag commanded by crag, passes innumerable, a warren of thieves, with a maze of bolt-holes to guard which needs a frontage of pickets extending over miles. On the map the line of posts of the Khyber Rifles would form a T, the head lying almost north and south from the Kabul River to Bara, and the foot covering the thirty odd miles north-east and south-west—the length of the Pass from Jamrud to Tor Kham, where the road enters Afghanistan. To the north-east the Guides guard the Malakand ; to the south and south-west the Kurram Militia, the North and South Waziristan Militias and the Zhob levies keep the road open across the frontier.

We reached our snug quarters in the fort at Landi

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Kotal, after a thirty miles' drive, in good time for lunch. The air here was as keen as a breeze off the North Foreland, and we had the appetite of berserkers. In the afternoon we rode down the Pass to the frontier, or the disputed tract where the road is neglected by the Amir's Government and our own. Brown figures lined the crags, still as trees. The pickets were doubled, to guard the road for the Kabul kafila, which was due in the caravanserai at Landi Kotal before nightfall. We met the van of it four miles down the road, strong men on strong camels. The hairy Central Asian beast puts our own Indian breed to shame. It would have been a reversal of history if it were not so. Strength, whether in man or brute, has always passed south through this gorge, and, remaining south, has become weakness.

We left Cavagnari's camp on our right, and entered a sandy flat overgrown with scrub willow. An immense dark cliff, Tor Kham, overhung the valley to the south. Graeme sent a covering party to a rise on the left, and we halted a little beyond it. "They might loose off at us here," he said, "if they saw us, but if we rounded that spur a furlong down the road it would be simply asking for trouble." We turned back. "You'll see the whole country to-morrow from Spina Sukha," he said consolingly. "If we have rain to-night you may see Jalalabad."

On the way home Graeme inspected the Michni Kandao blockhouse, the last on the frontier. The line of white boulders on the hill across the dip were range-stones. Ten white stones at a thousand yards, nine at nine hundred. They are too big for Khyber marksmen to waste powder on, so there are small white slabs, the size of your hat, laid parallel with them for rifle practice. I saw the men turn out to shoot. The Afridi on his own heath, or

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scree, is part of the earth, like a markhor or chamois; whether it is fanged rock or a shelf of sliding shale it is all the same. Elbow and knee are firm and easy as the rifle comes up and he takes his sight. One feels that the weapon is as much a provision of nature as horn, tooth, or claw. They shoot with a quiet glee. I could imagine the havildar saying, as the dust flew up behind the mark, "There goes old Madghali: damnation on his soul! So perish all his kin."

When they had pounded the small white stone to pieces, Graeme climbed up the iron ladder into the block-house and I peeped in from the top rung. The sweet scent of a wood fire and hot chapatties greeted me from inside. The long low-raftered room with the smooth boards, wooden supports and ladder leading up by a trap-door to another floor, and above all the smell of the flour, reminded me of an old water-mill I had haunted in my youth. From my perch I looked down on the road we had come up, winding under the heavy clouds into Afghanistan. The cave-dwellers were herding their goats; we could see the thin line tailing into a black hole in the *khud*, and donkeys following laden with their thorny provender.

The Michni Kandao blockhouse was attacked in 1908, during the Mohmund campaign, by a horde of Afghans. The garrison of forty had the time of their lives. The night was black as ink; the besiegers had got under the walls, and were laying a charge of gunpowder, when the Khyber men took off their shirts, soaked them in oil and threw them over the parapet. In the flare they shot down twenty. Graeme was telling me about it when the havildar came up, and I was introduced. "My friend Mr ——, Havildar Mir Ashgar—he comes from the Ratgal

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valley in the Kuka Khel country." We shook hands. He had a grip which warned me to get in first with the next man—the loose, perfunctory, hyper-civilised hand-grip is punished with cracked fingers. " May you never grow tired. You are the most welcome person," he said in Pushtu, and I asked for his ' holy health ' in an Urdu he did not understand. He had prepared tea for us—a good warming drink. When we had finished we laid our cups upside down on a board, implying a thirst eternally quenched, as etiquette required. Graeme signed a voucher for 135 rounds, checked the empty cartridge-cases and we cantered off. The last pickets were coming in from the hills, and the last camel of the Kafila was being prodded and dragged along the road into the caravanserai as we entered the gate of the fort.

My hosts would not talk shop that night, but there was a man dining in the Mess from the Mahsud border, and he told me how they settle up feuds there. When both sides are tired, they come to the Political. He had just presided at a kind of *jirgah,* in which Faction A and Faction B met. They have a kind of *nirik-nameh,* or tariff, like the list of current rates in the bazaar ; but instead of grain and eggs and chickens the account is made up in the lives of men. A life here, a rape there, the theft of a bullock, are entered, discussed and in most cases admitted by the offending party. When the palaver is finished and the items checked, the Political proceeds to strike them off, one against another, like a Bridge score. In this particular case it was found that the balance of offence lay with A Faction ; but, as my friend put it, it amounted to little more than ' rubber points,' A owed B 150 rupees : both parties were genuinely glad of a settlement, and it was agreed that the representatives

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of A were to hand over the money to the representatives of B on the following Monday at noon, when, after some amiable formality, the feud would be declared at an end.

It was a broiling-hot day in June, and the Political's temper was not at its best when, after a ride of forty-three miles, he arrived at the little outpost that was to be the scene of the peacemaking. At noon the delegates had not put in an appearance; just as it was getting dark, men came in with the news that two irresponsible young blades of B Faction had ambushed the messengers who carried the money, shot them and made off with the spoil. The Political spoke a few terse words suitable to the occasion. He told the tribesmen in Pushtu that they were impossible, and said that he would wash his hands of the whole affair. But as the elders on both sides were still for peace and the readjustment of the *nirik-nameh*, he agreed to reopen the case—on one condition. The two 'young sparks' were to be hunted down at once and dispatched. To this B Faction did not demur, the young men's heads were forfeit; the elders offered to bring them in to the Mess at ——! It might seem that, with such eagerness for a settlement on both sides, peace was assured, but in the meanwhile the account had swollen. The two messengers of A were to be added to the *hissab* [1]—a heavy item. The Political passed it; B admitted it, but at the same time put in for payment on account of the two 'young sparks.' This the Political disallowed. The delegates, he said, were treacherously murdered; the 'young sparks' were executed, it was an act of justice. But B Faction did not see the difference, so the fat was in the fire again.

"Swine-dogs," was Graeme's comment. These Waziris are savages. Imagine two Afridis haggling over a *nirik-*

[1] Bill.

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nameh before a magistrate like a pair of old apple-women.

The mere hint of the desire to avoid the obligations of honour is counted to a man's shame in the Khyber.

II.

Snow fell on the hills in the night, and there had been a sleety wind. When we got up in the morning we knew no film of dust or haze could veil Afghanistan. We rode out to Spina Sukha after lunch, over rolling plateaus, gradually ascending. The track we followed lying north and south, is used sometimes as a gun-running route between Kohat and the Mohmund country, and it must be crossed by raiders returning from the plains between the Khyber and the Kabul River. We passed a maze of little passes where the track topped the ridge; it would take the best part of a company to picket them, and even then the loopholes would be many by which these night-hawks might slip through. Nevertheless I would rather be a picket than a raider. The upright form has little chance against the man lying tight under the rock. One shoots at sight, or the shot echoes the challenge; no one is out for good on these dark nights.

"Don't you shoot the wrong man sometimes?" I asked Graeme.

"It did happen once, but it was a useful life. It stopped night-walking in the neighbourhood and made things simpler. . . . These chaps can't live on their fields," he added indulgently.

"No, of course not!"

Obviously. The crops were thin and problematical. We were riding in a narrow gully between two Shinwari

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villages, or groups of mud forts, each with its courtyard and loopholed tower.

"What is that rickety little tower doing in the middle of the field?" I asked.

"It was put up by the old sportsman in the house on the left to guard his crop. He was at feud with the people in the first house in the village opposite. You see that stony path between. Well, that's all dead ground; the tower covers it." Graeme pointed out the remains of the trench along which the old man used to creep to cover.

"What started it?" I asked.

"It is always a woman or a boundary-stone. A woman, I think, in this case; his son was the Lothario. The youth came into our hospital with a bullet in his knee, lodged there by a cousin. It looked a bad case, but the Doctor mended him. 'I suppose we will have your cousin in next,' he said the day he sent him off. 'Not if I get a shot at him,' the lad answered. And he was quite solemn about it."

"Is the old chap dead?"

"No, I saw him the other day. They made up a truce, or the other paid blood-money. I forget which. By Jove, there he is."

As we rounded the corner of the fortified *haveli* we came upon a group of Shinwaris squatting on the ground, deep in some palaver. One of them, the most benevolent patriarchal-looking old gentleman, rose up and saluted the Kapitân Sahib. The others squatted stolidly and stared.

"He was one of our fellows," Graeme explained—"before my time, though. It was not a very big vendetta. The old chap himself has accounted for about fifteen; but it mounts up, of course, if you count collaterals."

Graeme stopped and talked and laughed with the

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patriarch, and I sat musing on my horse, admiring the bluish tint a thorn hedge has in this cold dry air. Outside the fortified wall of the house there were a few thin lines of corn between sandy spaces, like a field in High Hertfordshire. The crop looked as if it must wither before any moisture fell. The very tissue of the clouds seemed warped and dry, though the rocks glimmered with a slaty sheen as if freshly bathed in rain. The soil beyond the field was the skin-yellow of the ball of the foot. The crags above wore a faint veil of mauve. In this rocky setting the sparse corn-field with its single apricot-tree in full blossom clearly etched against the sky, the herd of goats, the fortified tower, the group of immobile tribesmen, with their rifles slung at their backs, made up a mountain pastoral—a pastoral with no allurement, nothing soft in it to wean folk from keen-edged reality or to lull them to dreams of any but first and last things.

Graeme told me as we rode away that the patriarch had been speaking of some young blade of his stock who had not been cut down in the family differences, and who thought of enlisting in the Rifles. I dwelt inwardly on the initial usefulness of a recruit from these villages, a lad who had been a mark for a bullet from his infancy, who could slip through an enemy's country with a quiet heart and lie up like a hare in its form when the lead spattered against the stone by his side. I knew how he would slide his hand up to the bolt like a lover, his head becoming part of the still rock, and get his own shot in before he budged. Our border militia is made up of such stuff, and when they have learnt from us everything there is to know about the last rifle, we send them off to their homes.

Against these, when there is war, we bring men of diverse origin and training. Our own half-baked recruity

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will have to take his chance, a youth perhaps city-bred, born in tenements, amidst the smell of napthalamps, tar, beer and fried fish; municipally protected, unacquainted with anything more perilous than the kick of a coster's donkey or the fall of a brick. In youth his comings and goings have been guided by street names and policemen; he has moved along carefully aligned roads in rectilinear towns. He knows not the points of the compass or the stars or the dreadful whisperings of night. Earth has had for him but two elevations, the pavement and the kerb—yet such is the resilient disposition of the breed, the inspired conceit, he will not be awed when he looks for the first time on her naked face, though he has no more instinct for cover than a brewer's dray-horse.

Urgency and the fulness of time may in the end make as good a man of him 'at the end of a gun' as a border Pathan, but my respect for our officers increases when I think how nonchalantly they hold the passes and pray for 'a show,' though we may have a hundred and fifty thousand of these wolves on our flanks if the frontier rises when next we cross the Khyber.

Of course every Sahib believes in his own men, and it has been proved time after time that the English officer can count on the Pathan's loyalty. There are a number of Zakka Khels in the Khyber Rifles. When our punitive expedition entered their country in 1908 the Political called the tribesmen in the corps and told them he would not ask them to fight against their own blood. They might all take six months' leave if they liked, and no questions would be asked when they came back. The spirit of the offer appealed to them, and they stayed.

Our officers get on better with these tribesmen than they do with any Aryan stock, or with any Semitic stock

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domiciled within the border. " The Pathan is more like an Englishman," they say, if you ask them why. Or, " They are such sporting fellows." And one wonders, remembering how bloody, treacherous and ruthless they can be. Our code is not theirs. But the nature of a code is incidental ; loyalty to it is the main thing. The small community that can hold together by an unwritten law and maintain its independence, if not saved, is at least " eeligible for salvation," as my Babu friend would say.

They respect sanctuary and truce ; but certain acts are followed by certain consequences. A blow to a man or an insult to a woman means death. The life of the aggressor is forfeit : it may be filched by any wile, and the feud extends to the blood-relations, male and female, on both sides. Being naked, sick, or asleep does not save one from a bullet in the back. This is not treachery but law ; it is all part of the game and makes for alertness. I had not realised how general these vendettas are. It happens as often as not that when a man goes on leave from his regiment he must conceal the day he starts or he will be stalked like a mountain sheep, and once in his village he must lie up till it is time to go back and return by a circuitous route. Passion may keep a man's blood at the required heat, but it must be galling to be drawn into the quarrel of some fool of a collateral whom one values less than a round or two of cartridges. Yet the Pathan does not seem to mind his liberty being circumscribed in this way.

" It is like milk in his tea," Graeme explained. " You see, they have no nerves. It is no strain to them to be always stalking and being stalked."

It is part of the day's work, though the feud may be a mere obligation, a matter of form with little passion in it. Peace, though rare, is not prized. The road is

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sanctuary, and a man whose house is near by can dig a trench to it and sit and smoke his *hugga* in the sun all day under his enemy's eye; yet the privilege does not seem to be valued highly. The tribesman's tower and courtyard are bounds sufficient for his body and spirit, and when there is ploughing or reaping the need will be common and a truce can easily be patched up. In the regiment, I think, they are glad to ease the strain. Here the unwritten law is inviolable. Even when the sore is new or revived the man is safe; his blood-enemy will stay his hand when it is against the code to shoot. A man may have to watch philosophically in a lonely picket all night with the muzzle of his rifle against the side of his heart's abhorrence, whom he has been lying-up for in his village, and whom he will lie up for again. The psychology of such meditation under the stars is a subject made for a poet's hand.

As for the Sahib, there is always the chance of a *ghazi* in the regiment. The present Commandant of the Khyber Rifles was shot through the stomach at point-blank range in the verandah of his mess; the bullet passed through his back, and he survived by a miracle. Graeme pointed me out a youth who was road-making in the Pass, another visionary perhaps like the Wana assassin, but ridden by gentler spooks. The lad, whose name was Dhandal, had an honest dreamy face. He had been in the Khyber Rifles, but he had to leave, as he saw fairies. They came to him awake and asleep. They visited him once on sentry duty, and he challenged Graeme three times, but did not seem to hear his "Friend." He started after him in stealthy pursuit, with his loaded rifle stretched out as if he meant to bayonet him in the back. A subaltern following saw what was going on, and was just in time to snatch the rifle from him. He remembered noth-

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ing of it when the fairies left him, and was very unhappy when he had to leave the regiment and take up road-work instead of soldiering, although it meant fifteen rupees a month instead of nine.

I wondered how a sociologist would place these tribesmen. He might describe their state as a kind of socialism, because privilege is unknown among them, unless it is the privilege of being more manly than one's neighbour, or of having a finer sight to one's rifle, or a more cleanly sliding bolt, things acquired by inherent manhood more often than by heredity. Or he might describe them as individualists, because public opinion is sufficient control for them without law. Collectively the tribes preserve an easy federalism; among themselves they are individualists in times of peace, socialists in a tribal emergency—a simple solution of difficulties, and one denied to more complex organisms. Theirs is the social state from which we are so feverishly flying. No two political ideals could be more antithetical than those of the patriarch and Mr Lloyd George. Yet both are idealists. A border village might stand for the visualised hell of beadledom; and hell or bedlam to these blades would be a community in which one is pampered, protected, salaried, pensioned, insured, where men are given a money payment in a public law court by way of compensation for the infidelity of their wives.

The path broke up and we dismounted and walked through thorns to Spina Sukha. To be with a keen man on his own ground and to get him to talk about his work is an experience I always covet, especially when it is work which calls for the handling of men under conditions in which personality counts for more than the machine. I learnt much on that hill about raids and feuds and the heart of a Pathan.

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At five in the evening we stood on the spur and looked across the wide plain of Afghanistan to where the distant clouds hid the summits of the Hindu Kush. There had been rain across the frontier; I can think of no image to describe how clean and new-bathed the country looked. Dakka lay right under us among the corn-fields by the Kabul River, and Lalpura, the nearest Afghan cantonment, a few miles beyond. We could see where the Kabul road makes the great bend westward, skirting low hills and marsh, and farther to the north-west the dark patch of wood and rock that shadows Jalalabad. As a new chart in the mental Atlas one likes to carry about in one's head, it was the most satisfying view I had seen.

The next day we turned our faces southwards. Two hours in a motor-car took us over the Pass, back to modernity and the hot forced air of progress. We were received again by the unhappy land of whose troubles we have made ourselves co-heirs. Right in the path from Jamrud to Peshawur, as if to remind us of our joint inheritance, stands an enormous towered college. It is yet in the building, but it is to be the forcing-house of the new generation. Young men are to come here from over the frontier to 'gentle their condition,' to acquire by mild persuasion a culture and code which, as Graeme put it, has only been rubbed into us with great difficulty, and after some centuries, at the end of a stick. As far as the training of character goes, they have worked out a system for themselves, which at least ensures the young barbarian an inherent manliness, self-reliance, respect for his parents, loyalty to tradition. In the place of this we invite them to seek a spurious salvation. The state of mind of a Mahsud B.A. is unthinkable, whether he returns to eat his heart out in his village, scorned and scornful, or remains to drive

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a degenerate quill in a Government office. Allah never meant him for a *vakil*. One cannot picture him taking his stand with his Indian cousin on 'platforms' whose figurative 'planks' groan under the weight of ideals, principles, aspirations, causes—all that is at war with common sense. I have an impious hope that the Moral Reader may never find its way into the patriarch's house or divert the disciplinary bullet a hair's-breadth.

In Peshawur I asked a Hindu why they were building this great Muhammadan college, and he told me among other things that it was to bring "civilised blessing of peace upon benighted frontier," to "soften turbulent tribesman," to "ameliorate his condition" and to "render him amenable to law." Nevertheless I gathered that this fostering of Islam was viewed with suspicion by his community. The man who is a Hindu first and a Nationalist afterwards, resents it. He knows that if these tribesmen are gathered into the net of 'progress,' there will be no more talk of a pampered Muhammadan minority or of Islam going to the wall in a premature Swaraj. But the extremist, if he still exists, must be laughing in his sleeve, for it is as impolitic as it is unkind to hybridise the Pathan. It is better for us to have hordes of declared freebooters on our flanks, whom we can fight and understand, than an intriguing hybrid people who will traffic with the enemy inside our gates. Heaven defend us from an agitated frontier, sensitive to political catchwords, jealous of privilege, suspicious of grievances, sucking its wisdom from the lips of demagogues and lawyers! It will be a sad day when the jolly urchin, who flings us his *starri mshai*, "May you never grow tired!" across the road, greets us with a pert "Good marning!"

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III.

ZŬR, ZŬN, ZŬMEEN.

THE inner histories of happenings are often very different from the recorded story. In clubs and places where they gossip, as the rubric might have it, in drummers' parlours at commercial inns, in the secretaries' rooms in legations, in the lobbies of army headquarters, and at all unexpected times and in all unexpected places, comes now and again the flash of the inner history. You may get it in the hospital tent among those labelled with the green ambulance ticket, the men who are almost certain to die and are hardly worth the helping. You may hear it from the crippled Eurasian who was at work when a lad on the railway culverts in the Mutiny, or from the palsied old men who were at Chillianwallah. You are certain to hear it at the bar in the club at Aden, and even in the coffee-bar of the old Lord Warden, at the Savage Club Lodge, or the ' Morning Post ' Embankment Home.

There are so many things worth hearing the inner truth of. Why did Kaiser Wilhelm leave Palestine so suddenly ? What was really the trouble at Colenso ? Did Alexander of Macedon really cut the canal barrage on the Euphrates and so turn Mesopotamia to a waste again ? What did Charles the First mean when he said " Remember," before the axe fell ? If you heard the real true story of Zabern and how it came about, you would know why the German Army was so angry and sympathise with it.

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In Persia, that old, old country, whence come so many of the wise sayings of the world, there is a saying which lays all the world's troubles to three causes—*Zŭr, Zŭn, Zŭmeen*, Gold, Women, Land. We say cards, wine and women, which is only the Western form of the statement. It may be noticed that woman is common to both. Then apart to some extent from the 'inner history' we have 'the other side of the story.' Lately there has appeared that extraordinary jumble of Indian history in its false outer cover—outside 'Some Random Papers of the Pickwick Club,' inside 'The Indian National War of Independence of 1857.' It was a description by brains of infinite subtlety of the Mutiny from the point of view of a twice-born race struggling to free itself from a foreign dominion. Fortified by quotations and extracts solely from British writers, it stands a masterpiece from the anarchistical crucible of Krishna Varma and the Savarkars.

The following is an inner history of the great Frontier risings in India of 1897 from the point of view of the wayside. It will be remembered, perhaps, how in the days long, long ago, before even the Boer War, the whole length, or almost the whole length, of the North-West Frontier of India sprang, without apparent rhyme or reason, into open revolt. It began in the worst part of the year in Waziristan, and then all during the summer and autumn the fiery cross raged up and down the border from the Malakand to Wana. Section by section, clan by clan, tribe by tribe, the long length of the Frontier exploded, burst into flame without any apparent correlation or concert, but in succession, where least expected. As troops moved up to the Frontier from Hindustan and the Punjab, they had to be diverted from the appointed places of assembly and flung piecemeal to the spot which for the moment needed strengthening. A wave of Islamic fervour

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certainly was surging through the country. Turkey had just beaten the Greeks. Crescent had triumphed over Cross: the drum ecclesiastic of Islam was sounding fiercely. That was no doubt one of the reasons. The salt tax, the forward position of our outposts, our refusal to give up absconding wives so that their husbands might cut off their noses, were all said to be the grievances that had produced the extraordinary and unprecedented outbreak.

To the soldiery the causes of the trouble mattered not one jot or tittle. Off to the wars they went at short notice, each confident in the belief that whichever of their comrades was not to return it would not be him. That is one of the kindly provisions of nature that takes many a one through the dangers of life. Train after train ran over the thrice-guarded bridge by the old Attock Fort, or crawled over the *pŭt* to the Indus bank at Kushalgarh. Guns, Gurkhas, more guns, camels, mules, troop horses, Atkinses, pioneers, jammed and jostled and bit and swore, while the sun got hotter and the dust got deeper. Below the terminus was a bridge of boats, only one, to come and to go by, to fetch and to carry on. Those who have helped to bank the fires in a stokehole will have some idea what that bridge of boats was like. Out in the open plain on the Peshawur side it was not much better: the wind blew, it is true, but it blew red-hot, like to strip the skin from even a brown man's face. But the nights were cooler, with a distinct promise of winter. Round about Jamrud, the fort that stands in the plain like a turret-ship, to guard the Khyber mouth, lay the best part of a brigade of all arms. Up and through the pass was another, with two or three battalions guarding the road. The battery of artillery to which I belonged had eaten the bread of discontent for some weeks, and the

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white dust of the plain lay heavy on our stomachs. It was therefore with immense delight that we had obeyed a summons to march up the road, that great road through which British armies had marched four times already in the last seventy years. However, there had not been much to do. Half a dozen shrapnel at the skyline had been about the size of it, and the time had not yet come that was to see anything more than the opening of the road. Away in the hills to the north and the south there had been great doings. In the Khyber we had the consolation of blind Milton, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Now it chanced one day that it fell to my lot to take two guns with a foraging party up a side valley, to buy and bully forage from such villagers as were not on the war-path. Anent these same foraging parties, folks there be who inveigh against paying for what in war time they can take by force, but they miss the point. Paying for forage is not paying for what you get, any mug could merely snaffle that, but it is an inducement to folk to bring it to you, instead of your having to go to fetch it, and finding it gone for your pains. However that may be, foraging is dull work for the gunners, who wait in some central spot to bear a hand if aught goes wrong. It is not till the hour of withdrawal, perhaps, that you get a hint that anyone objects to your being there; then just as you are packing up it begins—perhaps an odd shot, perhaps a ring of sharp-shooting, from which to retire with dignity and without unavailing loss requires some skill.

On this particular occasion we had first of all halted by the high-road, where the side valley we were exploring turned off into a cleft in the mountains. The heights back to India were picketed, and the road was thronged with convoys and all such as take advantage of the road

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being open. I had strolled away from the troops with no better companion than my own Colt, and sat on a culvert close to a stage for the posting *tonga* to change ponies at. The daily *tonga* with the mails had just come up, and from it had descended a stout European, a man in the postal service, or the telegraphs, or what not. Two young Afghans, possibly the road contractor's employees, were talking by the culvert in Pushtoo, which I happened to understand. Said one bright lad, " 'Twould be a merry jest to jab one's knife into that fat Englishman's paunch."

" Better not," said the other. " These swine always carry pistols nowadays."

Whereon, as a matter of principle, I made a display with mine. Folks who move across the border and do not wear their pistols openly do an evil thing. False pride makes a man ashamed to let his neighbour think that he is sufficiently apprehensive to carry one. Again let it be said, to hide your pistol is an evil thing. It is putting temptation in the way of God-fearing Pathans and Afghans. You have no conception the temptation that the paunch of an unarmed European presents to the average young man across the border. It is as the lure of the big game to the Englishman. If, however, that Englishman is obviously armed, that is a great assistance to the young trans-border man to resist temptation. It is like having Dreadnoughts and not telling your neighbour ; it tempts him to be grasping. Anyway, the sight of my pistol helped the lads to overcome temptation, and they went about their business. Then I strolled on a bit farther, and I heard a man singing, singing as if all the world should know his happiness. I looked for the owner of the voice. It came from across a brook by a homestead clustered round a loopholed tower, of that comfortable kind that has a solid base and a front door ten feet up

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that you reach by a ladder. Towers of that kind are a common feature of the countryside. The solid base prevents your being undermined. This is a country where sometimes for months together the owner of a tower never leaves it by day. He and his women-folk till the fields by night. Not by day, oh no! Not by day. The owner of the next tower, seven hundred yards away, owns a Martini rifle, a real one, not the kind that they copy in the armourers' booths in the Kohat Pass, but a real one, and knows how to use it. It is unjust, especially if you make no allowance for the fact that you got one notch in the score to the good by killing his cousin last fall. Such is life without the *Pax Britannica*—never dull; but now and again those who live it and have been to India on a visit, a few miles off, wonder if after all it is not better to be able to go to sleep without wondering if you will wake up in the morning to find your throat cut, with your enemy wishing you the top o' the morning.

The life has its humorous side. A few miles farther along there used to live two chiefs, who had been at feud for many years. One of them had a cannon of sorts, a brass piece that made a fine noise and would hurtle a ball the best part of twelve hundred yards. His neighbour's manor-house lay a bare thousand away, and it was the greatest fun to see him and his friends scuttle from a harvesting when a stone ball ricochetted overhead. After half a dozen rounds had been fired the ammunition would run short, and then the neighbour would declare a truce and sell back the balls to the owner of the cannon.

The singing rose high and melodious on the breeze. I saw a man digging lustily by a patch of Indian corn close to a shrine, and I strolled across to him. My pistol-holster was so conspicuous that we were sure to get on. As I approached he sang away more lustily than ever.

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I gave him greeting after the custom of the country—

" May you never be tired ! "

And he gave the answer, " May you never be down on your luck," and sang on.

" Are you well ? " I proceeded.

" I am well," he replied, in duty bound, and continued his song. It was a merry one, all about the joy of a captive king who had escaped and got back to his kingdom.

" You must be very happy," I observed, " you who sing all day in time of war. What are you doing ? "

" Doing, *Sahib ?* Doing ? I am digging my brother's grave. My brother is dead, killed by the Zakkha Khel for carrying your despatches. My father is dead, killed last week by the English soldiers. My wife has run away to Peshawur and you won't give her up. I sing, *Sahib*, lest I weep. Song is better than tears for a man."

And here my friend threw down the long irrigation spade he was using, and stood up, as good-looking, straight-limbed a lad as ever followed Alexander of Macedon to father good-looking sons in a strange land. Afghan he might be, but not of the Ben-i-Israel ; there was nothing Semitic in the blue eye and straight profile. Straightway we liked one another as man to man, the handle of the Colt being witness to our brotherly mood. So I gave such sympathy as a man may, and we talked of affairs and this foolish war. We agreed it was a foolish war, but still young men were young men. Then he said, " *Sahib*, do you really want to know the reason of this war ? "

A year and a half later an excited Dutch lady whose husband, the predikant of the *dorp*, I had just arrested for high treason in Cape Colony, asked just the same question in the same manner. " Captain, do you really

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want to know the reason of this war?" Her answer was, "Because you English always think yourselves a little better than the Dutch." That, no doubt, is a world-wide sore, and accounts for the new Continental words *fivocloquer* and *offtake*. My Afghan friend's question was the same, the answer was longer.

"I will tell you the reason. You say that the tribes are foolish, that the young men are foolish, and that the elders can't restrain them, and must needs go with the stream or they will no longer be the elders. That is so, that is fact, but that is no reason. The tribes are not the only men who are fools. Now for some purpose the English Government wished to keep open the passes. That is an old story, and I have heard my father's father tell the same when Zemaun Shah was Emperor of Kabul. For thousands of years folk have wanted to keep the passes open, and we folk, the Pass tribes, have lived on it. In the beginning the English were wise, wiser than now. When they first began to pay us to let their merchants through the passes, there lived in Peshawur a family of *Khanzadahs*,[1] lords of the land, who had always been influential among us. They were the lords, and we knew it and they knew it. When the Sikhs, on whom be all misfortune, ruled in Peshawur, there was a *Balaitee*[2] general there called Witbul.[3] Even in his time the *Khanzadahs* were our lords, and were friends of Witbul *sahib*. That *sahib* was a *zorwallah*,[4] two dead men always hung at his gate, and Peshawur was quiet. When the English went to Kabul in the old time, it was the *Khanzadahs* who managed the Pass tribes. How do I know?

[1] Lit., 'noble-born.'
[2] European.
[3] Avitabile, the Italian general in the Sikh service.
[4] Strong man.

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Oh, my father and his father knew. So when the English tried to keep the passes free for merchants it was to the *Khanzadahs* to whom they looked. They paid them many *lakhs*, and the *Khanzadahs* became very great men. This is how they managed the tribes. They knew as I know what a savage the Afridee is, always except the Malik Din Khel, who are almost *Khanzadah* themselves. Yes? I am a Malik Din. How should I know about *Khanzadahs* otherwise?

"Once a year they sent for the *jirgahs*, who came in to them. They were met at the gate of the city by the *Khanzadah's* servants and escorted in great state to their residence. The head of the family received them in Durbar, with his family round him, very graciously inquired after their doings and their flocks and their feuds, gave them a feast and some good advice, and to the head of the *jirgah* a gold embroidered *lungi*[1] worth perhaps Rs. 20, *Sahib*, then to another a pair of embroidered shoes worth perhaps Rs. 10, *Sahib*, to the small son of the head a *kulla* worth perhaps five rupees, or hardly as much. That *jirgah* went on their way rejoicing, immensely gratified with their reception, vowing that the *Khanzadahs* were worthy heads of worthy clans.

"And thus, *Sahib*, were all the *jirgahs* treated, and they went and did what the *Khanzadahs* advised."

It was true, simple *Welt Politik*. In Australia who cares for the jumped-up ones? In Ireland, ah! in Ireland, nay, for the matter of that, in England, the new landlords are not like the old. However . . .

"There came a time when there was only one of the family left, the *Khanzadah* Allahdad Khan, and he alone controlled the tribes as his family and fathers had done. And then he died. All wise men knew that *they* could

[1] *Lungi* = head-dress; *kulla* = conical cap.

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handle wealth, but that the bare-legged men of the hills could not. Now, *Sahib*, what happened? Your Government is a very wondrous Government, with foolish ideas about men and how to manage them. There were none of the *Khanzadahs* left, and though *we* knew who could take their place, Government did not. Yes, yes, of course, the Commissioner *Sahib* at Peshawur knew—he knows about all things, that is his business. I mean the Lord *Sahib* and the Sekertaries who issue the *firmans*. A sekertary gave an order that the allowances were to be paid to the tribes themselves. An order came for all the head-men and the heads of *khels* to come to Peshawur. They came. A *policewallah* met them at Hari Singh Burj and Bara Fort. No, there was no ceremony. He brought them to a dirty bungalow with a dirty compound near the jail. A *sahib*, perhaps only a second-class *sahib*, sat dressed in a cotton suit. What do I know about second-class *sahibs?* Why, I've been to Calcutta. Then a babu called out from a list.

"'Jan Fishan Khan, *malik*, Zakkha Khel, 8000 rupees, *lejao aur dastkhat karo*.[1] If you can't sign make a mark.'

"A chapprassi handed him bags of rupees, and the man, a real savage *malik*[2] from Maidan, staggered away with the bags, wondering, but of course pleased. He had never seen a hundred rupees in a bag before. And so the foolishness went on till the *sahib* had finished, when he went off to his own house. That is all, *Sahib*, and the tribesmen went away together amazed, but knowing not whom to get advice from."

I marvelled to hear the story, partly from the shrewdness that the teller displayed, partly, too, because the tale

[1] Take it away and sign against your name.
[2] *Malik* = chief.

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must have been exaggerated, but I felt I had not quite got to the end.

" Well, and what then ? "

" What then, *Sahib ?* What then ? Why, what happens if you give a Turkomani horse to a beggar donkey-boy in a Ghilzai *kirri ?* The *maliks* became *Duniya-dar, Sahib,* and as you know when a man becomes *Duniya-dar,* especially when he is not *Khanzadah,* he loses all wisdom and must fight."

That was it, they had become *Duniya-dar,* that beautiful expressive Persian expression, " Owners of the world." To become *Duniya-dar* and not know how to behave ! An old story in an old, old world. Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil, from Jeshurun to Napoleon Buonaparte. Old wine into new bottles and the bottles had burst, that was my friend's diagnosis of his friends the *Duniya-dars.* These same at that moment were on the top of the wave, for I could now hear the rattle of musketry up the valley, and I had to leave the philosophic gravedigger and return to my cannon and bring fleecy shrapnel to burst along the hill-tops for the restraining of the *Duniya-dars.*

Time, the healer of sorrows and sore backs, added to the persistence of the soldiery who sat in the valleys while the *Duniya-dars* sat up on the hill-tops instead of doing their spring sowing, brought these same gentry to some show of submission, and the armies marched away. Then, after the custom of the artillery, " May I go on a year's leave ? " said the captain, and the fates being kind, six months after meeting the gravedigger I found myself back in England. An old aunt had died and left me a small property in the West of Ireland. Thither I betook myself, to find a side-line at the end of the journey with the train crawling, as the loaded troop-trains had

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crawled over the *pût* to the Frontier. When we left the main line the stationmaster had called to the guard of the train—

"Fwhat are ye waiting for?"

"The signal's agin me."

"Faith ye're moighty particular this morning."

It reminded me of the complaint of the Eurasian assistant surgeon coming up with a consignment of medical panniers in the mail train through the jam on the Lahore sidings—

"Oh my! What sort of a mail train is this to wait for a local! Eh?"

It was a day full of Frontier reminders. At my destination I passed by the barrack, now deserted, which had held till a few years ago a squadron of cavalry. The wall was a bastion trace, and there was a loopholed traverse covering the gate, for all the world like Fort Jamrud. A troop of cavalry had been burned in their barracks during the Rebellion, and the men piked as they jumped from the upper windows. I had not seen the place since I was a lad and ran wild over the bog and the moor with my neighbours.

Leaning over a culvert outside the demesne, a man passed the time of day, and then stared at me.

"Are you our new captain?" I admitted the impeachment.

"Glory be to God, we've got a man at lasht! Don't you remimber Micky Flannagan, sorr, that taught you to tie a fly?"

Happily I did, and shook hands very heartily. It is good to find someone that remembers you when you come to your own countryside. We sat on the culvert and talked of this man and that, and what had come over the country at all, and how the quality had all left the

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countryside. Then we talked of the tenantry and the lads I had known.

" What became of Larry O'Shaughnessy, whose father had the bit farm up on the Boyle water ? "

" Bad cess to him ! He went to America and came back with a mint o' money. It was more than he could sthand at all. He drank and he gambled and he fought the polis, and behaved just like one of the gintry, him that didn't know the good whiskey from bad, Mister Garge. He's been in jail these lasht two years, and fwhat would ye expect, a bog-throtter like that getting the money."

And then I remembered again my friend of the Khyber digging his brother's grave in the *kach* at Torwam, and his views on those who unexpectedly became *Duniya-dars*. Just the same story that comes down through the ages. In the Book of Wisdom, which some call The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach, it is written—

> " As the matter of the fire is, so it burneth.
> And as a man's strength is, so is his wrath.
> And according to his riches his anger riseth."

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IV.

FORT DROUTHY.

FORT DROUTHY sat on the plain and frowned—cause enough too! For behind, and on either hand, where smaller forts were dotted along the border-line till they were lost in the hazy distance, reigned law and order; while in front stretched the land and dwelt the Lords of Misrule—murderers, rascals, all of the latter in Drouthy's eyes, though in their own gentlemen of spirit and very heedful of their honours. And the fort, guardian of law and order, but only up to the border-line, misliked their methods and their manners, and resented them as any guardian should, who held within his gates fifty sabres and eighty bayonets—for that was the garrison—and yet was unable to smite the lawlessness of which he was compelled to be a daily witness.

Over against Drouthy stood the rocky sun-baked hills of the pass, usually also, but not always, meeting frown with frown; for at sunrise and sunset—more often the latter, their backs being then to the light—they could smile almost divinely. But the mud walls of the old fort, its loopholed curtains and hornworks and its embrasured bastions, could and can do nothing but frown. Like some huge modern line of battle ship is Fort Drouthy, set in a smooth sage-green sea, guarding the narrow entrance to a harbour on a rock-girt mountainous coast. From a distance of one mile to four this likeness is at its

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best, the low freeboard of the hornworks stretching fore and aft, the two storeys surmounted by the tower being the lofty midships structure ; the ancient mortars peering from the bastions are the guns *en barbette,* while the stumpy flagstaff and a wisp of smoke from the mess chimney on the top of the tower readily suggest at that distance the armoured mast and the funnel and banked furnaces of a leviathan at anchor.

The likeness dies away on nearer approach ; but once inside the gates it again asserts itself tenfold. For nowhere else that I know of, save on shipboard, would one find oneself so constantly climbing steep ladders and stumbling over such unexpected obstacles, such narrow alleyways or oddly shaped, quaintly windowed rooms. Gracing the entrance to the little anteroom stands a speaking-trumpet for easier communication with the distant parts of the ship, or at times for hailing the babu stationmaster at the forlorn little station out on the plain, to delay his daily train for a few minutes. Then, too, the wind can blow here as it can nowhere do but at sea. Confined through twenty miles of pass, it bursts on to the plain with marvellous vehemence, hurtles across the three miles of open, and the fort being the first obstacle in its way, it smites those old mud walls a woundy blow. Then Drouthy gives tongue on its yelling telegraph-wires, its whooping, shrilling loopholes, while everything on hinges bangs, tarpaulins are whipped off the guns, high overhead the flagstaff and halyards make almost as much to-do as the cordage of a full-rigged ship, and the air is full of flying gravel and grit painful to the countenance, and not to be passed unnoted in the soup.

The union-jack is always in tatters, and the filling-in (in triplicate) and the despatch of requisitions headed

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" Stores, textile, flags, union, one," are quite two of the most arduous duties of the not over-busy officer commanding this second-class fortalice. Disagreeable as these gales are in winter, when they cut through you like a knife, and when the patient troop-horse stands knee-deep in mud, with his sodden blankets unshifted for days at a stretch, yet who shall find an adjective powerful enough to describe these same winds when, heated seven times in the burning fiery furnace of the summer sun, they blow their searching, scorching blasts without pause day and night, night and day, for a whole week ? Sleep there is not, but boxed up in a hermetically sealed and tiny room the crew of the good ship Drouthy get through the night as best they can, tippling tepid soda-water and trying to imagine that the thermantidote, which is badly out of order, is pumping cool and not hot air into the room. This and longing for the dawn. But the hot summer gales have blown me out of my course. So let me return once more to the marine aspects of this most unmaritime spot.

Anyone who has stumbled the rounds on one of his Majesty's ships, and visited the guards at Fort Drouthy by night, will have found in the two duties much that is akin. Up this ladder, down that, bend here, creep there, mind your forehead, and now your shins and so on. And when the last sentry on the western hornwork has reeled off his orders, ending up with, " To challenge anyone approaching my post three times—once in English, once in Punjabi and once in Pushtu ; but to fire without challenging at anyone who approaches like a jackal " (this last order is not on the board), one may be almost justified in being on the point of asking him what his orders are about the patent lifebuoy ! For going a late round is sleepy work, and looking over the parapet on a

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dark night at the sea-like plain, stretching to the hills, one is once more at sea.

Drouthy not by name only, but by nature; for a well bored out of the solid rock, 300 feet deep, and containing a foot or two of bad water, is no way at all of satisfying the one hundred and thirty odd thirsts that continually do rage during five months of the year. Two yoke of oxen find just room to pace their leisurely hundred yards within the walls, and do thus draw up the dripping leather bag full of water once in every five or six minutes, morning and evening. Temperature on a June day at the well head, in the shade, anything over 100°; temperature of the water, fresh from its cool depths, as indicated by the hospital thermometer, just over 70°. Lucky microbes that dwell below! So the well water, which is only fit for ablutions, satisfies no thirsts. To supply the want, five miles off beyond the border-line is a precious spring, jealously guarded and carefully husbanded by the clan in whose territory it rises. For a monetary consideration, paid yearly, a supply of water comes from this twice weekly through a little open channel into the receiving tanks and filter-beds constructed within the fort. Yet this source dries up just when it is most wanted—that is to say, when the heat is greatest. Do not in the youthful innocence of your heart seek to obtain more water without the formalities of red tape, nor despatch a simple yet urgently worded letter to Moses at the rock telling him your plight. For this also is but vanity and vexation (vain on your part, vexatious to him), nor will you raise one drop till the usual form in triplicate (or is it—the matter being very pressing—quadruplicate?) has gone forth. Then, and not till then, will that official smite upon the rock, and a squadron of water-carts will come cruising out to Drouthy. Daily thenceforth will their

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clangour arouse you at screech of dawn, as they go forth to bring in the supply for the day.

In the two very small, very dark chambers that we call the mess, live the officers of the Pass Rifles. Sometimes we sat down as many as three. The Rifles themselves are quartered in a fortified barrack without the fort. Serving in their ranks are representatives of every clan inhabiting that portion of the border, for the ordering of which, indeed, they themselves are enlisted. I take it that their fine corps is in many respects very much what our own Highland regiments were when they were first raised. Here neither merit nor seniority are the only roads to promotion, for the social status or personal prowess in clannish warfare of individuals are qualifications still counting for much amongst men enlisting from tribal communities continually at war one with another. Thus, young Mohammed Gul, younger of Lala-Garhi (or Red Castle—no offence meant to the one in the Black Isle !), is given a direct commission, for he can bring in his train, and exercise some control over to boot, a score of stout blades, his sire's vassals. While Sher Khan, though a stripling barely out of his teens, having recently, in company with a couple of friends, scaled and taken by a *coup de main* his enemy's tower, and thereby proved himself to be a man of war, springs to the non-commissioned grade at once. Pleasant fellows are these Rifles, and whatever their faults may be—and I am aware that they own many—with the manners of gentlemen, and totally lacking in that somewhat oppressively respectful demeanour which is shown by, and indeed expected of, the regular sepoy towards the British officer.

To the status and better pay of the regular these irregulars are anxious to be raised, but they are wisely kept in that state in which it has pleased the Sirkar to

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have called them. Dwelling on the borders of their own country, strangers so far as any soldier may be to any form of spit and polish, and unequalled on their native scorching hillsides or in a freezing night ambush after stolen property; and lastly, but by no means least, enjoying the status which is accorded to them as being the only wearers in these parts of the king's uniform, by people whom his Majesty and his forebears have frequently had occasion to hammer. No 'regular' gets so much leave as the rifleman of the Pass, though sometimes, indeed, it is easier for him to obtain than to avail himself of this indulgence. Take, for instance, the case of Naik Gud Mulli. He has two months' leave due to him, and he appears at durbar, which is daily held by his commanding officer, and at which all such matters are transacted. The leave is asked for and granted from a certain named date. The applicant salutes, and gives place to the next.

Now Gud Mulli happens to have a blood-feud on. As he did the last killing, it is his turn now, and he has to be careful. Travelling as he has to do thirty miles to reach his tower, and limited as he is in that precipitous country to perhaps three possible routes, to start on a certain advertised date could for him scarcely spell anything short of death. Later in the day, then, he may be observed strolling unobtrusively across to his officer's quarters, where, making certain that his audience is a strictly private one, he mentions that, if there is no objection to it, he proposes starting on his leave on a Thursday instead of on the following Monday; and further, that his departure will be of an entirely private nature, not to say secret, and will occur in the very small hours of the morning. He may add with a faint smile that although it is generally supposed that he will be travelling by a

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certain route and over a certain pass, he is in reality going by quite another way, and over no pass at all; and that this may cause disappointment to certain persons who might not improbably be expecting his advent by the supposed route.

Further explanation is unnecessary. The private departure is sanctioned. How such a one will spend his leave depends on circumstances. Possibly he may dwell in peace, plough his land, do a little hawking and cultivate the domestic virtues—in which, by the way, our Highlander is sadly deficient, for he has the credit all along the border of being ready any day to sell a wife for a rifle; and it is a pet grievance with him that when his ladies fly into British India to escape bad treatment, they are not forcibly returned to him. On the other hand, his relations with a neighbouring tower may necessitate his remaining indoors during the whole of his leave, breathing his native air through a loophole, and committing to memory any range-marks visible through the same orifice that may be useful; or he may find wholesome employment in the excavation of covered ways, tunnels, epaulements and the like, which will enable him or his women to reach water in safety, or any portions of his domain which may be exposed to fire. He is a Royal Engineer by heredity.

Though he invariably has a Koran in his house, and it is invariably the only thing he leaves behind him when obliged to quit by a punitive force—in this he resembles the Boer and his *Bij-bel*—yet he will neither read it nor any other printed matter, for he is probably quite illiterate. Certainly an old native officer was once found seated in the door of his tower perusing a drill-book, which he held in one hand, while in the other he grasped a loaded revolver; and when asked what he was doing, he replied

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naïvely, "Spending my leave"! He was quite exceptional. No! any mental exercise that he may take will be in puzzling out how to rejoin his regiment with a whole skin and without over-staying his leave. And however he spends it, I have no doubt that he enjoys it just as much as you or I do ours; and if he thought about the matter at all, that he would wonder how we managed to spend our leave!

Does anyone, regretful of the romance of the Scottish clans of yore, wish to see a very fair reproduction of the men, manners and customs of those halcyon days? Let him abide at Drouthy for a month or two, talk to the men of the neighbourhood, stand on Drouthy tower and look abroad. He will see things and hear things that will give him a vivid and a true picture of the period before the 'Forty-five. For here dwells the chief, and here, in his tower, are his vassals. Some are blood connections, while others offer him service in return for what protection he can afford them. Here may be heard the skirl of the pipes (though without the drone); here rule the same laws of hospitality, the same love of foraying, harrying and cattle-lifting, one clan raiding another, or ravaging the richer lowlands. Here are esteemed hardiness, bravery, hillmanship, prowess in the chase, skill in the dance and success in my lady's bower. Assuredly, also, no petty Highland chieftain of them all was more punctilious in matters affecting his honour, or had a finer disregard for mercantile pursuits. Here also men see fairies and wraiths; and here a certain prayerfulness characterises the daily lives of men whose actions we should consider too often treacherous and bloody.

I know not whether the Highlanders of yore elevated their murders to the status of the vendetta. If so, you meet them here again, together with a somewhat quaint

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code of blood-feud laws to direct their protracted—I was almost saying tedious—workings. Two things are, however, sadly lacking to lengthen the parallel, for usquebaugh is not, and the rainfall might be heavier in these barren hills with advantage. Living amongst grey rocks and not amongst the greens, crimsons and yellows of North Britain, our clansmen of and about the Pass dress invariably in a stone-coloured homespun, almost invisible amongst their surroundings, where the darker hues of the tartan would afford too conspicuous a mark. Yet distinctions there are between the outward appearance of the men of one clan and those of another, in some subtle arrangement of the hair or dress ; for the M'Tavish, if he would be the first to shoot or stab, and the last to laugh, must, and can, distinguish at a glance his enemy of another clan. And since these marks are quite invisible to the stranger, we must complete the simile by accrediting these Eastern Highlanders with the gift of second-sight.

Nor does one at all realise what the blood-feud means till one has lived cheek-by-jowl with people whose business or else whose recreation it is to carry it on. Not infrequently in the course of a stroll near the precincts of the fort, or while standing on its tower, which commands an extensive view of the neighbouring estates and castles (all of the latter very much detached, and none at all desirable residences), the more pleasing aspect of a feud in full swing will be apparent both to your eyes and ears. A ragged volley and a puff of smoke (though, with the arsenal at Cabul turning out up-to-date rifles and smokeless powder, you will not always see smoke) will first draw your attention to the matter, and you will hasten to get the locality of both into the field of your glasses should you have them on you. A dozen or so grey figures couchant

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below the lip of a nullah or lying seemingly out in the open—seemingly only, for the Afridi never fights out of cover except in the service of his Majesty—will be all you find at first. The flash of steel, or, if your eyes happen to be right on it, a flutter of grey cloth, will presently mark the position of the other side. Then a little more firing and another phase commences—no imaginary forces here and practically no fictitious limits in time or ground for the conduct of the operations, and no white-banded umpires to spoil people's tempers by putting them out of action ! From the advantage of your position, maybe, you will observe a flanking or enfilading movement. Clearly now the objective of the attacking force is that little rising ground, the gaining of which undetected will give them the next move in the game. A few men are left to mask the movement, evidently with orders to blaze away undeterred by any consideration of expense or scarcity of ammunition : powder of sorts can be made, and, let alone other sources, a visit by night to the nearest rifle-range, only nine miles distant, can supply a certain quantity of lead.

But the defenders are not thus easily to be caught. In a scattered rush over what looks like very open ground, only no bullets kick up the dust there, they shift to a second position, and to your regret the conformation of the ground prevents further view of the combat. But these fights are almost as inconclusive as those fought with umpires and blank ammunition. Lack of the latter, whether blank or balled, will put an end to either : so will bad weather or darkness. And on the next suitable occasion the braves of either side will turn out to resume their play, with much noise, a good deal of smoke, and since people who like playing with edged tools must sometimes cut themselves, occasional bloodshed. Over

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this there is much lamentation on the one side and much elation on the other.

Still this, though one of the aspects of the blood-feud, can hardly be called murder by even correct you or me. There is another aspect—the inconvenient. Taking the air on the king's highway near the fort, one may often see an old gentleman on a crutch. He was winged some years ago. Now the road, though it runs through the lands of several foreign potentates, is ruled to be British territory, and is therefore strictly 'dead' ground. "None of your games on my road," says Fort Drouthy,—"fighting strictly prohibited": a death occurring on it is treated as a felony, and retribution, if quick enough to catch the murderer, follows. Hence such as dwell in towers near the road can, once they are out on it, walk abroad in safety. Still, to get there a dangerous zone may have to be crossed; and this is the case with the old gentleman on crutches, whose tower is adjacent, but between which and the road lies a distance of three hundred yards. With the range of every stone known to an inch, the odds are all against the target, however swiftly he may run, and with the cripple it would be a thousand to one chance and no takers. For though his tower is near the road, that of his enemy covers his line of approach thereto. So from the cripple's front door to the road has been dug a trench, along which he can crawl in safety while his garrison cover the sally-port of his enemy's tower, to prevent a sortie and the catching of the crawler at a great disadvantage. When it rains, which is not very often, the trench is a foot deep in water, and crawling along it must be very damp work. The cripple is pleased to show you over his defences, and exhibits with pride a home-made piece of ordnance of fearful aspect, throwing a solid ball, with which, if the

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stock was not nearly always out, he could render his neighbour's castle untenable.

The babu stationmaster at the little terminus, when playfully asked how long he expects to keep a whole skin, replies most sorrowfully, " Sir, I am not a fighting man. I know that this is work of too great danger—neighbouring gentlemans very bloody." He confesses, however, to having obtained leave to spend his nights within the fort walls, and leaves his little station in charge of no less than eight watchmen. His wires for instructions when two rival chiefs, who have been in to transact business with the Commissioner in the cantonment, and are awaited by their respective bodyguards on the not overroomy platform, are, I believe, on a par with that historical series of telegrams respecting a tiger jumping on a platform. For it is idle work waiting several hours for a train: not that the Drouthy trains do not run up to time, but because Asiatics have rather over-cultivated the virtue of being in good time for them, and the opportunites for picking a quarrel are quite golden.

It is difficult to know quite where to draw the line between where the joke ends and deadly earnest begins, or to say whether those affairs are more business or pleasure. Probably a mixture of both. To a stranger like myself their method and conduct are best explained by looking on the actions of these people as one would on a community of rather vicious, very blood-thirsty children, grown too old for toy guns, idle enough to quarrel plenteously, yet child-like enough to cry loudly on being hurt. " Let's play at murders," say they, and they do so. " Now let's play at sieges or battles ": they do so till tired of it. Yet this simile must not be pressed too far, for the essence of the vendetta is a continuity of purpose which has nothing child-like in it. Take the

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following. The actors might well have been children playing at sieges.

Within a few miles of the fort stands a village, though a better term might be invented to describe a group of towers, dwelling in proximity merely on account of water. The owner of one of these was wanted at Drouthy on some local business, and a sepoy in plain clothes was sent to summon him. The messenger, however, found him besieged in his castle—'kila-band,' as the term is. "You're wanted at Drouthy," shouts the sepoy. "Can't come," is the answer through a loophole. "Tell the sahib I'm kila-band, and ask him to send a man in uniform with a safe-conduct, and orders to the enemy to raise the siege for an hour or two." Away goes the messenger; a man in uniform is sent, the siege is raised without any trouble, and the beleaguered party under the safe-conduct—a sort of 'tabu' of these parts—is taken to Fort Drouthy. In due time he is returned to his tower, safely installed therein, and the investment recommences.

At night a blazing rick or two testifies to the fact that the M'Tavish is raiding his great-great-grandfather's enemy's great-great-grandson, and destroying the miserable harvest that has just been gathered. Ricks make a grand blaze, and the opportunity for playing with fire is, of course, not to be missed. Besides, does not honour demand it? The other fellow retaliates by next night ingeniously damming a water-cut and flooding the M'Tavish's ripe yet unreaped barley-field. And all under Drouthy's very nose! Indeed these acts are perpetrated by the men in his own employ, but only—very much only—when they are on leave and out of uniform. While serving with the corps they are perfect patterns of propriety, and all these barbarisms are dropped. A front-rank man with his deadliest enemy immediately behind

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him is as safe as any man can be. Mistakes and grievous accidents may happen, and that is how Yakub Khan had the misfortune to come by his death. He was one of the guard holding a small post, a chain of which extend all the way up the pass. They fell to arguing as to whether a sniper on a rock on the mountain-side that rose steeply in front of them could pepper them if they were sitting as they were then doing in the door of their little round tower. Sher Khan said, "I'm not going to argue. I merely tell you, Yakub, that he could." "The best Peshawur *loongi* to an old pair of grass-shoes he couldn't," replied Yakub. "Will you sit just where you are while I prove you are wrong?" said Sher Khan. "See if I don't," replied Yakub. "Right," answered Sher Khan, and taking his Snider rifle and one round, away he doubled, shinned up the hillside, reached the rock, lay down, slipped in his cartridge, adjusted his sights, drew a careful bead at his pal, and the latter being fairly hit through the head, has never misjudged a distance since.

These acts, especially the sham fights with ball-cartridge, are the less unpleasing aspects of the blood-feuds. Not that Yakub Khan was a victim to anything but a slight miscalculation of distance. The stabbings, the individual shootings, the lying-in-wait for, are the other and much more forbidding side to the picture. Perpetrated in lonely places, under cover of darkness, they are not so much in evidence; but still there they are, and anyone with a taste for cold-blooded murder stories, told in a simple, naïve, childlike manner by pleasant-spoken murderers quite at large, may hear a few from the men of Drouthy. The following is a very fair specimen.

A raiding party went out to raid. On returning they were hospitably entertained at the tower of one Mukdum,

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the chief of a village which was at peace with their own. Mukdum had two sons absent with others of their kin on another raid. The first party having eaten, drunk and rested, continued their journey; but before they had passed out of their host's territory they sighted the second raiding party "travelling noisily, like fools, with much cattle, taking no heed." The opportunity of securing twenty rifles was too good a one to be missed. Number one party disappeared into the rocks, and shortly afterwards the other party walked into a circle of rifle-barrels, and, like wise men, held up their hands when ordered to do so. They were relieved of their arms, and probably thought themselves lucky in escaping with whole skins. The first party then made haste to gain their own coasts before their victims should have time to raise the 'chigha' or gathering-call, and start in pursuit. Mukdum, who would probably have rather lost his two sons than their rifles, was furious at the treachery and ingratitude displayed by the men who had so recently eaten of his salt, and equally enraged with his own people for having been the victims of the trap. Pending counter measures, he swore by the Book that he would get back two rifles or claim a bloody substitute—two rifles, or two lives, or both. To deprive a trans-frontier Pathan of his rifle is not much worse than to take his life, for the possession of the former ensures the continuity of the latter. Hence the astoundingly high prices that these moneyless folk will give for a rifle—many times its original value; and hence that most enterprising, most crafty and most pestilent class of person, the rifle-thief, who murders sentries, conjures rifles from the arm-racks in crowded barrack-rooms, guard-rooms or tents, and pursues his avocation with that amazing combination of fearlessness and legerdemain which, if it costs him his life occasionally,

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yet more often pays him right royally. So Mukdum, taking his one remaining rifle and his two sons, set forth on vengeance intent, carrying a little flour in a goat-skin, and what water they could.

On the third night, having travelled always after dark, they were on the scene of operations,—a collection of towers, where dwelt the men who had taken the rifles. There was yet an hour or two before dawn to examine the *locale;* and to eyes accustomed from childhood to operations by night, this was not so difficult as it would be to honest men. The best place to lie in wait for game, whether human or not, is water. But the proximity of the towers to the village dam and the loud long-drawn cries of the watchmen, "Be careful! be careful!" showed that though it might be possible to lurk here by night, yet to do so in daylight would be madness. A hasty cast round the place brought them on to a well-beaten track, passing down the steep hillside above the village, commanding a good view of anyone approaching, and possessing on either side just enough cover to enable a man to lie there unobserved, provided that he remained perfectly motionless. The hillside faced south, and the heat there during the thirteen-hour-long summer day would be terrific. But this was undoubtedly the place, and the Mukdum trio went to earth just as the Mullah on one of the towers below them began his dreary call to prayer. That meant the dawn.

Light came, and with it the village flocks and herds, escorted by the whistling herd-boys, came up the path to seek pasturage on the ground above them. Soon every hill-top had lynx-eyes on it, and the three had to lie as still as hill-partridge amongst the rocks, for the smallest movement would have been detected. This almost intolerable roasting at length came to an end as the sun

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went over the hill, and the cattle were driven back for the night. Groups of men had passed close by the watchers during the day, but this was not what was wanted. When darkness at length fell, the ambuscade rose and stretched its aching limbs. They were in a bad plight. The youngest Mukdum had succumbed to the fearful heat, and was off his head and scarce able to stand. His elder brother was not in much better case. I give Mukdum's story in his own words :—

"I gave them what little water there was left, bade them eat bread, and when they had regained their strength, I sent them back, for another day would have killed them, and they were useless to me in their present state. I was thus left alone, and, it having been impossible to pray at the hour of sunset, I now did so very fervently. Then when all was quiet I crept down to the village to see if my prayer would be answered. But I left my rifle safely hidden, meaning to do what I wanted with this long knife. I went first to the water and drank my fill. Then I crawled through the village, visiting and listening at each tower ; but all I saw was a young fool making love to a girl. As men don't go armed to such affairs, I let him be. Fate was not kind ; by dawn I was back in my place, and laid my head on the north side of a rock, so as to have a little shade. By sundown I was wellnigh insensible, but again I prayed for strength, and after dark managed to crawl down to the water. Here I lay almost spent, but having drunk I was able to eat a little bread. As I lay by the water I heard a man singing. Now this too was the act of a fool whose fate has been written.

"The singer drew near me, and now against the skyline, as he topped the bank on that side of the dam, I could see him, with what might be a rifle over his

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shoulder. No one was with him. Fate, which gave him a joyful heart, thus warned me of his coming,—for had he done so quietly he might have heard me eating or taken me unawares,—and now directed his steps round the edge of the water, till he was on my bank. I lay quiet, knowing he could not see me, and hoping that he might not step on me, and would pass by and have his back to me. But he did better. When two yards off—it was very dark—he stopped, and I knew he was about to unload. I wondered whether I should hear the sound of the block of a Snider falling back, or the click of the Henry-Martini breech being jerked open, or the gentle drawing back of a Lee-Metford bolt. It was a Lee-Metford. He took out the cartridge, and then coming two steps nearer he lay down, placing his rifle on the ground and lying between me and it. Then keeping one hand on the rifle, and turning rather from me in order to do so, he stooped to drink. He was thirsty, and as no man is in worse position to defend himself than when lying to drink, I let him do so for two breaths, and made ready. At the third suck I placed my left hand on his head, pushing his face deeper into the water, and with my right hand I thrust my knife between his shoulders. It was a true blow, and he never moved, lying with his face in the water, which bubbled a little, and then all was still. At first I thought of pushing him into the tank; but since it is written that to pollute even an enemy's water is infamous, I drew him out, and as he was a believer, I crossed his hands on his breast and so left him, taking his rifle and rounds and returning to my place by a different way. The women who came out to draw water early next morning found that rash one who had drunk so incautiously. I could see and hear them as they called to other women; and presently, after much talk, men

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came. Later there was great wailing, and at sundown I saw him carried forth to burial.

" It was cooler that day, the sun being covered with clouds, for which I thanked God as I lay. After sunset, but before dark, a party of men, armed and carrying food, came up out of the village along the path near which I was hiding. Where they were bound for I do not know, but when they were opposite me a grey-beard, looking back, said, ' Where is that lingerer Baz Khan ? Has he not come yet ? ' A young man with the party turned and shouted back, ' Oh, Baz Khan ! Come quickly and follow us by the upper path.' Then they passed on out of sight. Presently the lingerer came running. He carried a rifle and a skin full of flour. To have shot him would have attracted the attention of the men who had just passed on, and probably of others yet in the village ; nor is a running man facing towards you and armed with a rifle an occasion for stabbing. As I was pondering how I might slay him an old woman came out of one of the houses and called to him that he had forgotten the parcel of dried dates for his father, adding, ' Oh, thoughtless boy ! how far will those grass-shoes on your feet last you ? You have left the bundle of *mazri* to make new ones lying in the byre ! ' Fate granted that he was an obedient son, or that he feared his father's wrath in the matter of the dates, for he turned back unwillingly enough and ran down the hill. Well, his blood be on his mother's head, for it was she that kept him till it was dark and his companions had passed out of ear-shot. When he came breathless up the hill again I was ready. A man breathing hard and hasting forward is deaf and blind to that which is behind him. I dealt with the lad as I had dealt with that other. He was very young, and his face as smooth as a girl's. Then, since there was no

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hurry, for his mother thought he was with his father, and his father thought he was following him, I renewed my strength on the dates and the bread, newly baked by his mother. Then binding two of the rifles with *mazri* rope and slinging them on my back, I took my own in my hand and started homewards by a different and longer road, lest the armed party I had seen go forth, suspecting that the killing of the man over-night was an act of vengeance for the taking of our rifles, might be awaiting their chance on the more direct road. I reached my tower in safety on the morning of the fifth day."

I take it that the foregoing story shows an average kind of beginning to the blood-feud. But even these quarrelsome folk grow weary of it sometimes. To be shut up in a tower for perhaps as long as two years, never to reap or sow, and to be dependent on your kinsmen for all the necessities of life, must pall after a time. And there is a way of ending a feud, or a certain class of feud, when both parties are willing to do it. Word reaches the nearest political officer, no matter how, that two individuals, long at war, are anxious to patch up a truce. The Political summons both parties on a safe-conduct. They arrive, with followers, to all appearances more implacably bloodthirsty than ever. One of the parties, if not both, know well why they have been summoned; but on the reason being told them, a blank amazement is evinced that anyone could possibly have been so misinformed as to suppose that they could have had enough of such an heirloom of a quarrel. "Speaking for myself," says one, casting a withering glance at the other, "my honour can be satisfied with nothing less than this man's blood, though of course should he——" But here the other party, assuming his most truculent air, hastens to assure everyone that he is equally irreconcilable. "Certainly,"

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he replies to the Political, "I have not ploughed these two seasons; but what of that! My tower is well supplied, and will not my kinsmen, for their own honour, furnish me with anything that may be lacking?" and so on.

But where there's a will there's a way; and, *a fortiori*, where there are two wills, and a tactful and knowledgable officer to direct two pairs of willing sandalled feet into it, that way, after the scruples of honour have been laid to rest, is not very hard to come at. Terms having been arranged, a cairn is erected and peace proclaimed,—the erection and demolition of a cairn being the Pushtu for making and ending peace.

A mention of singing-birds may appear hardly in place amongst these turbulent pages. Yet the larks of Drouthy are its very special and only pleasing feature. In that land of unrest, where everything suggested the very antithesis of larkdom, they certainly seemed quaintly misplaced. Yet here they were,—not such lofty soarers nor so full-voiced as those to be heard in our own spring skies, yet vocal withal, and seeming to extract from their stony surroundings as joyous an anthem as if they had nested in green fields and under a tender English sky. Moreover, the Drouthy lark sings not by day only,—as anyone who has tossed through the long hours on a burning bed, high up on the ramparts, should very gratefully recollect, for the silence of the sleepless hot weather night is often broken by first one and then another of these little birds, trilling the most joyous of songs, lasting perhaps but a minute or two, and then dying out as one after another they sink again to rest on the parched and stony plain.

Cause to recollect, say I, for instead of cursing God, and wearily turning the other cheek to the burning

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pillow, you cannot help but translate these outbursts of melody into wordless thanksgivings to the Creator ; and you, following, let us hope, so excellent an example, bless instead of curse, and patiently await the first cool puff from some far-off snowy peak, that ends wakefulness and heralds the advent of the dawn.

Silent, gloomy, old tower ! Well may you frown ! Yet who knows ? Only four years ago 10,000 men lay about you. Your not too spacious quarters contained a whole general and his staff, and the pass was full of your armed men. War was in the air : were not the very sandbags on your parapet nightly peppered by snipers ! All these passed, like many and many another host before them, leaving only their dead ; beginning with Hari Singh, hammer of the Scots of these parts, who fell fighting in the pass, and whose white shrine set in the eastern wall, inscribed with his name and fate, may be seen from afar, and ending with the dreary little enclosure where shrunken wooden crosses tell of Trooper Jones ' killed on patrol,' or of Private Brown ' died of enteric '—quite a few years ago. All manner of warfare has Drouthy seen, from the stern methods of the Khalsa, who burnt what they did not slay or could not eat, to those of less than a decade since, when tribal representatives flocked in to discuss terms, to protest against conditions, and to eat abundantly of the fat-tailed sheep provided by the victor, and eke to play a little football with Thomas Atkins ! Now comes the hurrying globe-trotter, to do the pass and be back for breakfast. While he changes horses or picks up his escort, he may ask what is that circular track cleared of stones, and still littered. " Why, that was the race-course made while the Division lay here." " And those crumbling mounds ? " " They were the grand stands, though they could never accommodate half the crowds

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that came from camp and city to attend the weekly Drouthy meetings." These few boulders mark the stone wall—the general wanted it stiff—and the 'post and rails' was just opposite here. " Yes, it was all made by fatigue-parties, to keep the men hard when the Division lay here."

" Ah," says the globe-trotter, too much in a hurry to realise quite what it means, " it looks a bit forlorn now, doesn't it ? "

But Fort Drouthy, old in wisdom, has seen too much bloody traffic pass his gates to believe for one moment that he is left for good, or that the tide of war has ebbed never to flow again. What has been will be. But what the next affair will be,—punitive, avenging, aggressive—Drouthy knows them all,—that is the cause, with other matters aforementioned, of the permanent frown.

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V.

WANA.

I.

EVEN a full moon, which does a lot for desolate places, failed to tone down the ghastly desolation of the pass in the jaws of which the force lay. Its rocks, cliffs and stony plateaux kept an eloquent silence as to the history of the place, an unbroken record of blood. If it was a thirsty land, the thirst was not for water but for blood, and it had been slaked in every possible way that the brain of man could devise—by raid, onfall, bushment, stabbing, shooting—and was, and is still, thirsty.

A stream burbled over the rocks. It issued from one narrow defile or tangi, spread itself over a little space of flat and disappeared into the dark of another tangi—a furtive stream whose waters had too often been stained.

On both sides of the water, and between the two tangis, lay the force, secure within its cordon of pickets posted far above them on the cliffs.

Next morning it marched, the heights on either side of its road having been previously seized and held. As the tail of the column passed these pickets they descended to the road and added to the most vulnerable part of a moving column, its rear.

So it arrived on a bleak upland plateau, of great extent and girdled with hills, those on its farther or northern

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extremity being snow-clad mountains, with pine forests showing black on their lower slopes.

Here the force, or, to give it its proper title, the Delimitation Escort, went into permanent camp.

A High Commissioner had been sent through the passes to delimitate a doubtful boundary. And as the country and the people amongst which the boundary was to lie were both very rough and very tough, the High Commissioner had been given an escort : a tolerably strong one—three battalions, a battery of mountain guns, a squadron of cavalry, some sappers and the necessary oddments ; the whole under a general, who was an old hand at this sort of business.

The Escort went into a perimeter camp—that is, it was packed close within a completely surrounding defence. The High Commissioner set up his huge pavilions outside the camp. On all sides stretched a plain, in appearance perfectly level and smooth. But from the hills three miles away in one direction a nullah, eroded by rainstorms into the semblance of a deep railway cutting, ran right out into the plain, and passed one side of the camp and some few hundred yards from it. It gave a convenient and quite invisible avenue of approach from hills to camp, and a good gathering spot for an assaulting force. This was a fact patent to all. But as the force was not an expeditionary force, nor in any sense of the word at war, but merely an escort to a delimitating High Commissioner, the position for camp had been chosen from its nearness to water rather than from its tactical invulnerability.

Of the three battalions in camp, one bore the letters P.F.F. (Punjab Frontier Force) after its name, another consisted largely of Afridis, and the third was a Gurkha regiment. The Piffer regiment on arriving in camp, and

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as a matter of ancient routine, immediately tucked itself away behind a stout breastwork of stones and a good ditch on the far side of it. The Afridi regiment, which, from its composition, presumably knew what it was about, and the Gurkhas, who were a well-blooded lot and quite alive to frontier ways, were not so careful, and did not erect such a high breastwork as the Piffers, and they omitted the ditch. It was close to the Gurkha front of the camp that the deep nullah ran. Each regiment held an allotted portion of the camp perimeter, and, as always on these occasions, tents were pitched all round and just inside the perimeter, so that occupants could step straight from tent to their posts on the breastwork. To the cavalry, who were also Piffers, was allotted a small length of perimeter to hold with dismounted men. Their horses were well inside the camp. Some guns were also on the perimeter, the battery headquarters and mules being well in the interior, together with hospitals, transport animals, mules and camels.

There was a constant procession of maliks, or headmen, to and from the High Commissioner's tents outside the camp, and to these men the lie of the camp, the positions of units in it, and the nature of the defences were therefore no secrets.

Tribesmen of the North-West Frontier never relish the presence of armed forces, however peaceful their intentions, within tribal limits. Before many days had passed political officers began to talk of trouble brewing, and hinted at an attack on the force. Everyone said " Good business," and began to think of medals, or rather of clasps to the old N.W.F. medal with its blue and red ribbon, which nearly everyone there already possessed.

Incidentally these hopes were not disappointed, and again incidentally this was to be the last occasion on

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which that old medal and familiar ribbon, the former showing our young Queen's head, and both having been on issue during the last fifty years, were to be awarded. Senior officers already possessed five, six or more clasps, at the end of which dangled (on rare occasions) the single medal which represented such frequent war service. The sands of Egypt offered more prolific soil for decorations; for there a short little campaign of a few months' duration, and under the most perfect limelight, never produced less than two, and often more, decorations per head. And with such splendid ribbons, too!

On receipt of these rumours of impending attack, no alterations were made in the dispositions of the Escort, nor were the High Commissioner's tents brought within the perimeter. Presumably this was on the principle that geese laying golden eggs are immune from slaughter. That High Commissioners are geese I do not affirm, but that they do lay golden eggs is a matter of common knowledge, and hungry tribesmen are fond of this kind of egg. So the White Tabs, which are the mark and badge by which you shall know the political and civil officer when in khaki, lay without the defences and held jirgahs. Jirgahs are pow-wows conducted in Pushtu, which is the language of these tribesmen, and are dear to all who summon them and to all who attend them, but unspeakably dilatory and boring to soldiers.

From information received, it was now announced that an attack would take place on a certain night and at a certain hour. The force stood to arms throughout the night, and went to bed very cold after dawn.

The same thing happened on two succeeding occasions, and on each the force stayed up all night, and went to bed not only cold but cursing politicals and tribesmen—chiefly politicals.

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And yet a fourth time word went round: No lights and stand to arms till after dawn. This attack was timed to be delivered on the stroke of midnight. The camp lay too far from any hills to picket them at night. They were held by day, and patrols moved everywhere. But at night all troops lay within the camp, save for a few small 'warning' posts, stationed a hundred yards or so outside the perimeter, behind little breastworks of their own. Their function was to shoot and skedaddle; but neither the day pickets nor patrols had seen a vestige of any movement or gathering.

Darkness fell on the camp, and silence. For all the sounds that came from it, it might have held sleepers only. There had been clouds and a little snow during the day, and night closed in very dark and with an icy wind. A perfect night for a rush on the camp, and a very imperfect one to await it, crouching behind parapets.

Midnight came and went. One o'clock and a dark night. Two o'clock and a cold one. Three o'clock—would it ever come? It did, but four o'clock came yet slower, with more cold and no less darkness. At last five o'clock—the chilliest hour—was approaching, the hour when night, with a final tweak at blue noses, vanishes. The General thought of his shivering men crouching behind the breastwork. He looked at his watch, and again he looked, and yet again. That took him till 5.30 A.M.—half an hour to dawn. He put his watch back in its pocket, held a murmured consultation with his Brigade-Major, and presently the Orderly Officer vanished quietly into the gloom. Leaving the usual guards and sentries on the perimeter and the warning-posts outside, troops were to turn into tents, armed, and ready to turn out at a moment's notice. These were pitched, as before mentioned, so that egress could be made from

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them straight to the breastwork—a matter of a few strides.

Picture, then, some 2000 chilly men flitting silently into the tents, sentries every fifty yards along the breastwork, guards just behind them, and those lonely little posts outside camp, each of four or five men, blowing on their fingers and counting the moments till relief time. Had but one man of them tiptoed forward a couple of hundred yards and peeped into that silent nullah! But orders were strict—there were to be no casual movements from behind wall or breastwork between dusk and dawn.

The Gurkhas thus turned into their tents with the rest, and as they were on the windward perimeter and the cutting breeze blew right into their tents, they laced them up.

This was the state of affairs at 5.40 A.M.

At 5.45 A.M. came a fearful jackal yell.

II.

Now let us turn to that nullah.

For days past a pestilent moollah, or priest, had been on the rampage. He spat out curse and exhortation to ears easily enough inflamed, and to souls ready to imbibe a great deal of hatred seasoned with a little religion. Eld counselled restraint, but wagged its grey beard ineffectually at Youth, who was neither to hold nor to bind. A few days up and down the country did it. The moolah set going a tide which swept all with it to the attack of the Unbeliever. A gathering-place was named, and the Fiery Cross, or its equivalent, rushed abroad over stony hillside and barren upland. From tower to tower it passed, from cave to cave—for many hereabouts in winter dwelt in caves; and hordes of those lean, valiant,

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dirty and fanatical tribesmen came to the tryst, well back in the hills, at the hour of midnight, and here the moolah treated them to a final sermon.

After this, percolation down that nullah began—swordsmen, a-many; jezailchis and matchlock men, a goodly number; and the fortunate possessors of stolen service rifles, a few. With them the moollah, still booming curses, till they bade him cease. The nullah was packed with moving armed men, silent; and their feet, sandalled with fibre from the dwarf palm, gave scarcely a sound. A long hour or more they waited in the nullah at the point where it passed nearest to camp, and here they quietly marshalled their order of battle. A band of several hundred swordsmen, anxious to slay and loot, but ready to die in so good a cause, was to lead the rush. Once within the camp the mass behind them was to follow, or said they would. Among them the moollah, or said he would.

The assault was to be delivered at the darkest hour, just before dawn. The moollah had promised a dark night, and dark it was. He had promised a scuffling wind, which would help a complete surprise, and behold! it blew and scuffled across the plain twenty feet above them.

So at 5.45 A.M.—this by the Brigade-Major's watch and not by any that the tribesmen carried, you may be sure—came that fearful yell. A quick scuttering of sandalled feet had preceded it, and the yell had occurred when the warning-posts had been reached, overwhelmed, cut to pieces. So sudden had been the onrush, and from such utter darkness had it come, that one warning shot, and one only, had been fired.

The next instant the swordsmen were at the parapet, and the next were over it and into camp. The sentries fired, and the guards ran up. But these failed to check

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for one moment the rush. And now the tribesmen were at the tents, slashing at the ropes or at any head or hand that showed from within. Many tents went down, and their occupants were slaughtered as they lay beneath the canvas. Groups lingered here; other groups passed on towards the hospitals, cutting up screaming followers, rushing here, there and everywhere—dark figures appearing and vanishing. None could tell friend from foe.

All this within some two minutes of the first rush. The silent camp became immediately alert. But two regiments were on the perimeter distant from the direction of the attack, able to hear the uproar, but to know nothing and to do nothing. Here they stood facing two ways, the half of them turned outwards to their front, looking into the darkness, for from this direction attack might come, and half faced inwards. In the one direction there was nothing to shoot at; in the other an enemy certainly, but friends also. No shooting possible that way. And not a shot was fired. Good discipline this. The ranks stood steady and silent, and within a few yards raged pandemonium. It was mentioned later as a remarkable and a regrettable fact that in one of those two regiments (not the Piffers) some men had called out for the guns to fire. But the guns at the breastwork could not be swung round and fired into the brown of their own camp.

The Gurkhas within their laced-up tents soon cut their way out, and forming rallying groups, large and small, opposed kukri and bayonet to curved sword and embossed shield. Up and down, in and out, falling over tent-ropes, stabbing, clubbing, clutching, they were not long in breaking or diverting that first frothy rush of enemy. Some of the latter fell back; others passed on to where things were less strenuous. It was still pitch dark.

What of the General? His tents and those of his staff

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were just clear of the line of the first rush. And he and those with him in the darkness could at first do nothing. Had there been orders to issue, to whom should they go, and how should they be sent? But to find out something the General immediately sent his Orderly Officer (his nephew) to learn what he could. And he, steering to where the noise was greatest, owed both his hurts and his life to the darkness. He had not gone a score of yards when a party of the enemy fell on him, and cut him down. Before he rolled out of sight and into the partial protection of some tent-ropes, he had received some dozen or more slashes. Here he lay insensible, and his assailants, after a brief search, hurried on and left him, sorely wounded but to recover.

The cavalry squadron had on the alarm immediately manned their portion of breastwork. The squadron commander, not realising that the danger was from within the camp, and that it was his horses that were exposed, left only a small guard of four men under a young British officer in the horse-lines. Now a hundred cavalry horses, almost unprotected, each horse picketed head and heel, afford in the dark a fine objective to swordsmen, who can in the minimum of time cause the maximum of damage by cutting horses loose, and wounding them and stampeding them through a crowded camp. Perhaps also, since dawn was coming and it would soon be time to quit, it would be well if cavalry pursuit were rendered impossible. A party of the enemy came silently out of the dark and set to work. But they had a lively young officer to deal with first. He, loafing through the horse-lines and envying his comrades on the parapet, heard the sound of sword-stroke and of plunging horse. He made for the spot, and at once jumped to the heart of things. Running in on the only figure he saw, he cut him down,

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was immediately set on by a dozen, fired his revolver into the brown of them, and made them give back a pace. This gave his four men time to run up. These were armed with carbines and swords. Two of them he at once ordered back to watch the farther end of the line of horses. And with the other two, whom he ordered to use the sword only, he made in at his assailants. But these had no stomach for this sort of thing, and vanished. Only one horse had been cut loose ; and the guard here was at once reinforced from men at the breastwork.

And what about the guns ? It didn't take their officer long to realise that shelling the outer darkness would do no good, that shelling his own camp would do much harm, and that what was wanted was light. At once came the order, " With star-shell—load," and immediately a succession of these light-givers kept pouring skywards, giving a ghastly light on hurrying figures, loose mules, blundering camels and incipient fires. Men could now see who was who, what was a-doing and where. The enemy's glorious crowded hour, or to be more accurate, three minutes (for all the above had happened in something like this space of time), expired with the flight of that first star-shell.

There was still much unpleasantness to follow, but the worst was over. The enemy were now right into the hospitals, in the very heart of camp, and were playing havoc with patients, followers, mules and camels. But of their main body, not all had followed up. Some had followed, hesitated and returned to the nullah. Others had never left the nullah. The rush of swordsmen lacked solidity. And, on the whole, it was well for the camp that this was so.

The General, getting no intelligence from his Orderly Officer, and having now sized things up more or less, sent

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his Brigade-Major to one of the two unoccupied regiments. He, after a perilous but fortunate passage—for a crowded perimeter camp is at no time easy to traverse in the dark—reached the regiment and delivered a brief verbal order: "Form line across the camp, and clear it with the bayonet." No more welcome order had ever been received by waiting impatient men. Promptly it was carried out. The regiment was clear of the enemy, and, uninterrupted, ran out its line of bayonets and began its steady advance right across the camp. Light was now coming, and the enemy did not await this broom that evidently meant to sweep clean. Not a shot was fired—a few of the enemy were bayoneted, and then the camp was clear. Away streamed the invaders over the plain in ragged mobs, taking the shortest route back to the hills whence they had come.

Orders now followed quick: Guns to come into action at once; Cavalry to saddle up and pursue; Infantry to follow in support.

The squadron had already flung themselves at their horses in anticipation of the order. Saddles were bundled on, arms seized, and away they trotted out of camp in single file. Then, forming line and extending on the move, they were laid on, and away they went—their fox only a mile ahead and cumbered with loot. One was observed wearing on his head a vessel of dishonour taken from the hospital latrine. Behind the cavalry banged the little guns, and over their heads screamed the shrapnel. The infantry were left nowhere. The cavalry were to see the matter through. Those left in camp stood on the breastworks and watched them doing it.

As pursuers closed with the pursued, the former automatically adapted their more regular formation to the draggled-tail formation of the latter. Here a section of

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six cavalrymen, scenting a suitable prey, closed on their centre, and went in at a bevy of a dozen flying enemy, passed through them, killed a few, left a few lying unhurt and carried on, leaving the survivors to their comrades farther in the rear. Here a troop, disregarding fragments and wisps, made at a much larger body, drove through it, their swords rising and falling in stroke and point, and then, coming about and dissolving into twos and threes, went at more leisure and more thoroughly into details. Here single troopers spurted at single men, some of whom turned and stood to them, while others—the majority—preferred to receive the onset prostrate. The latter sometimes escaped for the moment, but behind were other troopers, and behind them again eight hundred eager footmen. The nearer the hills were approached, the worse the going, and this, though the plain looked so smooth, had at no time been good. The officers far ahead being better mounted served rather as guides to the general trend of things, but were also busy. Called one to another: "I doubt being able to catch a pig over this going, but these Wuzzeroos can't go for nuts!"

This hustling advance left behind it a certain gleaning for the infantry, chiefly tribesmen who had foxed till the last mounted man had passed, and who now broke and ran again.

There were two dark spots on this otherwise bright occasion. The tribesmen were all clad in sheepskin coats, and the cavalry, bar N.C.O.'s, carried swords. N.C.O.'s alone were armed with the lance. Now leather and wool are two things ill dealt with by even the keenest sabre and the most skilful swordsman. Sheepskin is much easier poked through by lance than cut through, especially when prostrate, by curved sword; so that some of the

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jobs were not quite so clean and quick as might have been. Still, on the whole, and considering——

At last, and only when the cavalry came surging up against the impossible hillside, the pursuit was stayed. The infantry had cleaned up all behind their mounted comrades, and for the latter there was nothing more to do than rally, reform ranks, ease girths, and count gains and losses. To man and horse there had been a few casualties from sword or knife-cut, pistol or jezail shot, more from rolling in the nullahs. But the toll exacted from the enemy evened everything up very satisfactorily, and left a large balance in hand.

During the whole scrimmage in the dark the High Commissioner's tents and their occupants (who had a very sorry time, and had wished themselves anywhere but outside camp) had remained quite unmolested.

The Delimitation Escort shortly after turned itself into an Expeditionary Force, and was largely increased. Then it gathered itself together preparatory to a move forward. But before it left to overrun the enemy country, a now historic khud or hill-race was held. Entry was open to all, and local tribesmen were especially encouraged to compete. Plenty came, and there was a large entry also of Afridi sepoys and Gurkha riflemen. The odds were laid heavy on the local cocks, who, it was felt, should run better both up and down their own dunghills than outsiders. But the men of Nepal betted on themselves. A fearful hill, more precipice than hill, was selected. Spectators watched from the plain below. They saw the Gurkhas slower up, and not amongst the first few at the crest-line turning-point. But downhill the little men came like showers of falling boulders, and the first three men in were all Gurkhas. The local cocks did not distinguish themselves.

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Then away marched the force to pillage and destroy a country which held no pillage and nothing destructible save for a few towers. These were dealt with. But you can't destroy caves, or follow flocks and herds up into the clouds where they have been driven. I think operations ceased at about the 8000-feet level, where on Christmas night the ink froze and the bread, but the rum held out.

Those were days of simple, straightforward, frontier warfare—sword and jezail on one side, and rifle and bayonet on the other. Other forces have since then fought over the same country (and will again). They have added aeroplanes, long-range howitzers, machine-guns, automatic rifles and bombs to their armament. But the tribesmen have cast away their swords—the occasion related was, I believe, the last occasion of their use—and jezails, and have replaced them with modern rifles obtained from a great friend of theirs and an ally of ours. And things have become much more difficult—for us.

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VI.

OUR FRIEND THE MULE.

To speak kindly of the mule to a circle of those that know him not, is too often to find one's remarks received with a frank incredulity that is hardly to be distinguished from rudeness. It is as though one had told a dog story. The subject seems to be one upon which the mind of the public is hopelessly made up. Born under a cloud—for, alas! he is illegitimate, a fact of which he is profoundly aware—it is under a cloud that the mule is doomed to live. We credit him with two positive virtues, sure-footedness and a strong back, neither of which he can help; for the rest, general opinion is sufficiently indicated by the fact that the word 'mulish' has been introduced into the language as an expression for pig-headed cussedness in its adjectival form. This being the case, and as one is conscious that the general tendency of this paper is towards the rehabilitation of the mule, it becomes necessary to state, by way of preface, that the opinions set forward are the result of an acquaintance with our friend which was spread over some years, and included, on terms of more or less intimacy, some few hundreds of him.

And, indeed, even assuming that the worst were true, it is hardly for us to blame the beast. For the mule is not natural, but artificial. The Zoo knows him not; neither, presumably, did the Ark. He was not included

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in the scheme of Nature, but is the invention of man; actually, he is man's contribution to the animal kingdom, and it would be only decent, in weighing his characteristics, to remember our own responsibility in the matter. But no. Man gets his slave, and then gives it a sore back and a bad reputation. The horse is noble; there is pathos in the ass; let us beat the mule.

But injustice is one thing, want of justification another. It may be said that there is no smoke without fire; that the mules one comes casually across *do* kick; that they *are* obstinate; and, therefore, that the normal mule is plainly a thing of naughtiness, of vice. Well, it all depends upon what you mean by the normal mule. The mule of which I speak is one that has known the ordinary surroundings of, say, the British horse; he has been treated with the usual attention and kindliness to which that animal is accustomed—in fact, he has become more or less familiar with those just men, Thomas Atkins and his officer. I do not think that this is an animal that can rightly be called abnormal. If such methods of treatment as applied to the mule are exceptional, the more shame for us; but you cannot call a character normal which has been warped by neglect and ill-treatment. Let it be remembered, then, that however great the difference between the mule I describe and the mule of popular imagination, the former is merely an animal that has been given a fair chance, has been allowed to develop in a normal manner and consequently is the normal mule to anyone who has not got the heart of a brute.

For convenience' sake, let us at once deal with the two cardinal vices with which the mule is popularly credited —namely, the vice of stubbornness and the vice of kicking. Now, I readily grant that, *if* a mule is obstinate, the white cliffs of England are not more immovable;

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also that, *if* a mule kicks, he combines in the act the force of a piston with the accuracy and wholehearted enthusiasm of a dancer in musical comedy. At the same time, of the mules I have known—remembering what I mean by a mule—speaking from recollection, I can recall two that were viciously stubborn and two that kicked from vice; and in each case these vices were combined in the same animal, which makes two vicious mules in all. In both these instances the obstinacy arose from a rooted objection to one particular nature of work, and of such objection the kicking was the outward and visible protest. One of these animals persistently declined to carry a load, but put a saddle on her back and she went like an angel. The other accepted the load with docility. She would also go extremely well in a cart—up to a certain point. She lived on a hill—to be exact, in the Citadel in Cairo—and at the foot of that hill, on her return journey, she resolutely and dogmatically drew the line. Thus far would she go, and no farther; as to dragging a cart up that cursed slope, she was adamant. But to condemn a whole race on two partial instances would be somewhat analogous to the case of the recalcitrant juryman: "Ah, thin, eleven more obstinit men I never met." Indeed, so far as my own experience goes, one is inclined to take these animals as exceptions, and to deduce the general law that the mule does *not* kick from vice and is *not* viciously obstinate; and I doubt if a smaller proportion of exceptions could be found for any rule applied to any order of being or any class of character.

And again, kicking in the mule takes two forms, one for general purposes, one for assault. In the first, his heels tend to describe an arc of a circle about his fore-feet as pivot. In the latter, he thrusts out one leg, like a cow. But I have only once been kicked by a mule,

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and that was by a raw remount who had probably never been spoken to kindly in his life, and to whom the white man was only a new kind of enemy. I leave him out, therefore, though he nearly kicked me into the next world; and, speaking generally, with regard to this form of vice, I have little doubt that you could go down the lines of a British mountain-battery with a good deal more chance of immunity from the assaulting hoof than you would get from those of the walers of a field-battery in India. But I would offer a word of counsel to anyone who thinks of trying the experiment. The horse will give you warning —when he meditates guile, his aspect is that of a sinner; but the first notice you get of a mule's kick is the impact of his foot. He does not lay his ears back; he is extremely accurate in his aim; and in range his leg is almost telescopic.

The ability of the mule as a worker is, we know, recognised; his back is strong and his feet are sure. This, no doubt, is all very well as far as it goes, but, like the cow's tail, which was meant to brush off flies, it does not go far enough. The finer qualities of the working mule are not those of accidental mechanics; they are of the head and the heart. A more willing beast never existed; and, if he has equals, he has few if any superiors in the matters of endurance and good-humoured philosophy. This is high praise, but one example will make it good. The mountains of Baluchistan are, as ground for marching over, particularly unpleasant. The 'going' is mainly over loose stones; there is no shade, practically no water, and to all intents and purposes you make your path as you go along. During manœuvres some years ago, we started one morning before dawn and marched under such conditions, up and down, down and up, till about 3.30. The force thus pushed ahead was small when it

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started; it was smaller still when it came into action. But the guns were there. One mule only fell out, one of my own. The mules of a mountain-battery are provided with reliefs, but on this occasion we had no time to get the relief line up and change loads. The mule I mention marched on, hour after hour, mile after mile, showing no slackness, offering no complaint, and finally fainted away with the load on her back—fell down in a swoon like a girl. And there is your pig-headed obstinacy.

Now this was not an isolated case. The only difference between her and her companions in misfortune was that she happened to faint and they did not. And, though I am not concerned to uphold the mule as superior to the horse, remember this. The horse will gallop his heart out: he is uplifted by excitement. He may die between the shafts; but will he go on to such a pitch without an occasional persuader? But if there exists any less exhilarating form of work than that of these mules I have yet to learn what it is: they were not flogged up to it; and they had not even the support of knowing that they were going towards their nosebags, for, as far as they could tell, they were moving in exactly the opposite direction. I do not think I need labour the point of the mule's willingness, comparative or otherwise.

But it is, as we know, as a mountaineer that the mule shines, and here again merely to mention his surefootedness is not to go nearly far enough. Soon after I joined a mountain-battery we were taken out for a big climb, with the express object of showing what could be done in that way, and some of the problems the mules solved on that occasion were of a nature to make the hair stand on end. I would as soon have asked them to climb a tree. The weight carried is great, ranging, as it used to, from 260 to 360 lb.; the ease with which impossibilities

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are achieved is ridiculous; and the philosophic coolness with which a mule will stand, with all his four feet close together, perched on a pinnacle of nothingness, and thence determine the next downward step into the void, is a study of cheerfulness and sound sense under difficulties to which I know no parallel. He never loses his head. He never seems to want to turn back. He does not get frightened at prospective perils. He knows exactly what is wanted of him, and literally brings his mind to bear on each emergency as it comes up. And it is at such times that one begins to see that the mule is not only a beast of burden, but a strange and fascinating mystery.

It must not, however, be supposed that the mule is devoid of animal weaknesses. Far from it. He is extremely susceptible to cold and want of work, and, like a fresh horse, under those bracing influences will betray a spirit of irresponsible larkiness that is deplorable. In such a mood he loves to wait till the load is on his back, and then, before it can be strapped on, with one hilarious uplifting of his hinderparts to send half a gun or a steel carriage hurtling over his head. But we must distinguish between kicking of this nature and kicking from vice. His action is merely that of a fresh hunter on a cold morning. And at such a time, on the flat, one is likely to see something that is worth money. A battery manœuvres at a walk. This, to the bursting mule, is apt to become monotonous. Presently the battery comes to a ditch. The mule has to jump, and the driver must give him the length of his leading-rein. That is all he wants. Over he goes, and with the impetus thus acquired makes one glorious dash for freedom. Now the mule has no mouth, and to pull him up once he has a start is about as easy as to stop a runaway motor-car by hauling at the

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lamps. At the same time, the driver knows that the manumission of his captive is attended by an automatic penalty. Consequently he hangs on to his end of the rein for dear life till, as the mule gathers speed, he is compelled over the terrain with the prodigious strides of the ostrich. His great boots twinkle, and his flying feet scarce touch the ground. But the space-annihilating powers of the human leg have limits, and too often that limit is reached. The moment comes when 'something must go.' With a gesture of despairing protest the driver's end of the rein is cast wildly away as though to the winds, and the mule passes victoriously on to freedom. The sight, though maddening, was exquisitely laughable; and it is to the mule's credit that, having blown off steam, he was pleased to return graciously to his place in the procession and resume his duties with the demure aspect of one in whose mouth butter would not melt.

It is an odd thing that, though as a rule the mule's trot is a run and his canter a scuttle, in these moments of abandonment he will sometimes give a display of natural paces that are extraordinarily fine. As a rule he keeps these performances for the level, but I still have in my eye the picture of a great grave mule, with a Roman nose and a head like a suit-case, trotting imperially about on the side of a hill that was not only extremely steep, but mainly made up of loose stones. He had over 260 pounds on his back, and from his nonchalance and superb action might have been supposed to be showing off on a specially prepared track. As a matter of detail one may mention that, however good the mule's paces may be, his lack of mouth would certainly prevent their exploitation on the turf. Some years ago, I believe that one of the batteries at Rawulpindi had a mule that could beat any pony in the place over hurdles; but, as a rule, a mule

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race ends in the field sidling tangentially off for home from the nearest corner.

Apart, however, from his conduct as a labourer the mule is the possessor of certain traits, both mental and physical, which are equally curious and valuable. In the first place, he works up to a comparatively considerable age. The one of whom I have made honourable mention was, if my memory serves me, fifteen years old; and a baggage-mule we had underwent, at the age, I think, of twelve years, a surgical operation that would only be attempted on a young horse, and was perfectly well in a very short time. Again, the mule has not got the nerves which, in the horse, have led to the saying that he is a fool. When he is being entrained, he may play the idiot outside purely from levity, but once he is in he shows no sign of alarm: a horse may go in quietly, and get wildly upset when he finds himself in his unfamiliar surroundings. I have often wondered what would happen if a mule saw a ghost. One hears that such a sight has a parlous effect on horses and dogs, but I imagine that a mule would either take no notice or put his ears back to be stroked. At the same time, this collectedness is not mated to slowness or stupidity. The mule is surpassingly wise, and, if the following anecdote is to be accepted (and it comes from an untainted source), he is capable of rapid thought and prompt action in an emergency. This was told me by an officer who, so to speak, was a comrade of the mule in question. It was in Burmah, and when the mules were, I think, returning from water, the situation became complicated by the sudden arrival of a mad dog. The difficulty, however, was immediately adjusted. A mule volunteered for the post of honour. Moving out, the intrepid creature went for that mad dog, rose in the air, came down on its body and stamped the life out of it.

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Physically speaking, again, the mule has the horse's coat, but will look extremely handsome with only half the amount of grooming. He is less difficult in his food—he seems to enjoy blankets and tails—but is nicer with regard to water. His foot, though often badly shaped, is extremely hard; indeed, he can perfectly well go unshod. And, most valuable of all, he is provided with an unfailing remedy for fatigue! I refer to rolling. Is your mule exhausted? Strip him of his burdens, and leave him alone. He will roll; for not only is a roll a magic recuperator for his flagging energies, but, by a wise decree of Providence, it is a practice of which he is passionately fond. And you should watch him. The deliberation with which he begins, the relish with which he employs each side in turn, and then lies, deeply thinking, spread out perfectly flat, and plainly concentrating his mind on the last great effort, the enthusiasm with which he tries to roll clean over, and the air of satisfied triumph with which he gets up, having done so, are little less than exhilarating to the weary man that is looking on.

For his qualities in private life, the mule has undoubtedly a sense of humour, though of an elementary type. I do not know whether his reason for denuding his neighbour's tail of hair is that the naked result appeals to his idea of the ridiculous: it is possible. Sometimes, when I have been standing looking at one mule with my hands behind my back, the stick I was holding has been very gently drawn through my grasp and dropped on to the ground; and when I have turned upon the sinner, the transparent innocence on his countenance seemed to show that he enjoyed the jest. But of one joke the mule never tires. During the process of having his girths tightened he will inhale deeply, with the result that, when he resumes his natural dimensions, the work has to be done all over again.

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This is a jest from which the absurd creature derives an exquisite relish.

Both in his voice and his use of it the mule is quite individual. Unlike the horse, he does not greet his comrades from afar, nor is he given to the derisive paroxysms of melody with which the ass is wont to regale his lighter moments. Indeed, he is a silent sort of beast. I think he only sings by way of thanksgiving. He will acclaim the time-gun if in his mind he connects it with any festivity, and the stirring sound of the feed-call will invariably promote his psalm. His song appears to be limited to a grace before meat. And such a song as it is! Though his theme be joy, and his spirit uplifted, he has been endowed with a long-drawn melancholious wail that would seem to announce that he has plumbed the very depths of grief. To hear a whole battery of mules raising a pæan in chorus is as depressing as the sound of a funeral march.

And in considering these individual traits one is led back to a point of view of which mention has been made —namely, the mule as a mystery. Here we have an animal standing midway between the horse and the ass, each of which has its own tribal characteristics. But the mule, instead of inheriting his traits from either or both of his parents, blossoms out as a thing by himself. Now where does he get these traits from? Why is he so magnificent a mountaineer? Whence come his intelligence and common-sense? And why does he combine with these two qualities his lack of nerves? Why, again, when he has his mother's coat, does half the attention produce an equal result? What makes him particular as to his drink? If we accept him as a fluke, and say no more about it, the matter becomes almost more complicated. For, assuming his physical qualities, how about his mental? In an ordinary case, one is wont to ascribe any high powers

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to a scientific process of reproduction—that is to say, to evolution properly directed. But the mule in his own peculiar qualities has nothing to do with evolution. The rolling centuries affect him not. With the birth and death of every mule, Creation pauses. As the first mule was, so will the last mule be—a creature of individual characteristics, which are not to be tempered, mitigated, or extended by any process that can be employed to the improvement of nature in general. He is a creature without continuity —excellence ready-made but sterile—and as such he must remain for all time a dark and insoluble mystery.

Throughout this paper I have striven to bear in mind the injunction—

> "Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice,"—

and I still do so when I say that, if asked to describe the mule's temperament in general, I should call it one of peculiar docility, friendliness and affability. One set of mules I knew, from being entirely looked after by Mr Atkins, became as confidential as a lot of great dogs: to see the man and mule going off to water with their arms round each others' necks was quite a sight. Give him a chance, and he is not only one of the most honest and honourable of beings, but one of the most attractive and sympathetic. It all depends on kindness—kindness in all respects, but especially kindness with regard to his ears. For his ears are his delicate points—and point. Physically, this is pretty obvious. The tips of our own ears are tender enough in all conscience: if one reflects on the enormous length of the mule's ears compared with ours, one can get some faint idea of how exquisitely sensitive to pain those members must be. The expression on the face of a confiding mule who, with eyes closed

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and chin resting on your shoulder, has laid his ears back to have them stroked, is one of luxurious ecstasy. But once put a twitch, once lay unholy hands, on those most inviting objects, and he will never forget it. And this result is not altogether physical. I believe—and I speak seriously—it is because you have done him gross insult. For the oddest thing about a mule is this,—he loathes a donkey. On a donkey he will commit the most unprovoked assault. Feeling himself to be a horse gone wrong, he bitterly resents any reminder of that dark stigma on his birth which he so deeply deplores. His coat is not the donkey's coat, his tail is not the donkey's tail. His song, though not the music of his dam, is far removed from that of his detested sire. But there is no getting over those ears. Palpable symbols of a proud beast's shame, they rise erectile, not to be ignored, and deliberately, coarsely, not only to thrust them upon his notice but actually to employ them as engines for his discomfiture, is both physically painful and in deplorable taste. We might at least pretend not to notice them. You will never make a friend, you will never keep a friend, by insulting him in his weakest points.

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VII.

GRIT.

I.

If you leave Peshawar cantonment by the west gate, through the barbed-wire fence which surrounds it, you find a narrow metalled road, some nine miles long, which leads you to the Frontier Constabulary Fort of Bara. It is on the administrative border and guards the mouth of the Bara valley, up which runs the track to the big upland plateau of Tirah, about seventy miles away. Tirah is the main summer residence of the Afridis, the biggest and most powerful tribe on the frontier.

In the year of grace 1912, in a narrow rocky valley leading down into the north-east corner of Tirah, lived Maliks Gul Mast and Mir Badshah, both Kambar Khel Afridis. Between these two families for generations there had been a blood-feud, famous throughout the tribe for its bitterness and the relentless manner in which it continued to be prosecuted.

Nature and circumstances were all in favour of Gul Mast. His village was at the mouth of the valley where there was a good spring and some of the best land in Tirah. His family had prospered exceedingly, and he himself had made much money in contracts in Peshawar. The result was that he was a power in the land, both with the tribe itself and also in its dealings with Government. In his

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own village lived his three sons, the two elder grown up and married, the youngest a stripling of sixteen. A fine-looking family they were, with the physique which comes from good food in a poor land. His eldest son was a particularly striking-looking man, having the browny-red beard and grey-blue eyes occasionally met with in the trans-frontier Pathan.

Dotted round the borders of his land were the separate villages of various brothers, nephews and cousins all loyal to him, and ready to support his cause up to a point if called upon to do so. The collection of villages, each with its tower or towers, was an imposing spectacle, and gave a sense of power in a land where life is cheap and might is right. He could, indeed, assemble quite a respectable little army should occasion demand it.

In contrast to this picture of strength and opulence was the village of Mir Badshah, about three miles up the valley. As you rounded a corner you came upon it suddenly in its solitary glory, on a bluff high above the nullah bed, with a weather-beaten almost hungry look, like an old grey wolf viewed suddenly on the skyline.

The base of the village measured perhaps thirty yards by twenty, and it had a fine square tower at its north-east corner. It was in a strong strategic position. The hill on which it stood commanded the track up the valley to its west for 500 yards in either direction. Its tower overlooked all ground within close range to the north and east. The only danger-point was from the south, where a spur, covered with thick scrub jungle, afforded good cover for snipers, while the dead ground behind it was a possible concentration area for a more serious attack.

Things were not going well for Mir Badshah. At one time an important malik of his tribe, his power and prestige had dwindled with the rise of that of his enemy. He

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was poor, his cultivatable land was small in quantity and of bad quality, consisting as it did of a few small terraced fields below his village on the banks of the nullah. His only water supply was a small pond farther up the nullah, formed by a dam to catch the rain-water when it drained down the valley.

Sickness and his blood-feud had decimated his family, as the ruins of an adjacent village, once the property of his eldest son, testified. He owned a few sheep and goats, but the grazing of them presented great difficulty, since anyone taking them far afield was more than likely to be shot up by the Gul Mast faction. Moreover, the comings and goings of himself and his family were always a source of danger. They could obviously not approach or leave their village by the main track down the nullah since it passed by Gul Mast's villages, and they consequently had to make wide detours over the hills by narrow and difficult paths, which ran through scrub-jungle where an ambush might be laid if their movements were observed or anticipated.

His family was now sadly reduced in numbers and was in sore straits. His eldest son and his wife had both died of sickness two years previously, leaving no children. His second son had been killed by his enemies. All that were left to him now were his two younger sons, both unmarried owing to poverty, and one daughter. Of these the eldest surviving son, Khanai by name, took after his mother, who during her lifetime was an estimable wife and mother, but stupid. Moreover, he was physically weak, having the enlarged spleen which comes from privation and much fever. Mustakim, his youngest son, was the apple of his eye, and deservedly so. Tall and straight as an arrow, he had the lean, athletic, loose-jointed frame of the hillman, the face of a hawk and the courage of a lion.

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Circumstances had made it imperative that he should seek work, and, to his father's intense disgust, he had followed his secret inclination of many years' standing and had enlisted in the army. He was now doing a steady eight hours a day as a recruit in an infantry battalion, which was panting its way through a typical month of June in the cantonment of Jhelum, in the Punjab.

You could see at a glance that Gulabai Nur, the daughter of the house, was Mustakim's sister, and between these two was a bond of affection unusual between members of opposite sexes in the East. Poor child—she was only fifteen, which corresponds to about eighteen or nineteen in a European girl,—the cares of the house lay heavy on her. Hers to fetch the water morning and evening from the pond, a quarter of a mile away and one hundred feet down a steep path, in a big earthenware pot. It was too heavy for her immature strength, and she always had to put it down and rest half-way up the hill. Hers to cook and to clean, to scrub and to mend, to cut wood for her cooking, to graze their few goats when no one else was available, to fetch and to carry, and generally to look after the comfort and welfare of her menfolk. Hard work but the normal existence of the women of the East, combined after marriage with the production of children at a steady rate of one a year for the glory of their lords and masters.

No wonder they grow old so soon.

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On the first day of June 1912 Malik Mir Badshah had a long shot at Malik Gul Mast—who never went abroad without an escort,—and missed.

Thereafter he had an uneasy suspicion, common to wild animals and wild men, that all was not well, and that his house and all the movements of his household were being watched always by unseen eyes. For the first time his

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indomitable spirit began to fail. He was getting old and his enemies were very strong. His heart yearned with an uncontrollable longing for Mustakim, his son.

A few days later, at dead of night, Khanai, by his father's orders, left his home to summon his brother there by hook or by crook. Neither he nor his father could so much as sign their names, and the nearest post office was at Peshawar. Thither he journeyed.

Next morning Malik Gul Mast sat long in thought. Then he summoned to his guest-house his sons and various other trusted male relatives, twelve in all. To them he spoke thus—

"Allah the merciful, the compassionate, has delivered our enemy into our hands. Khanai left his home last night on a long journey, for he was carrying food and water, and Khanai is a fool. The dog Mustakim is in the Punjab, so we have only one old man and a young girl to deal with. They cannot defend all four walls of their village at once, and I grow weary of this feud and would end it once and for all." There followed long and detailed instructions for an attack on Mir Badshah's village, to each man being assigned his own particular task. When he had finished there was silence for a while. Gul Mast's youngest son asked a question. His father considered for a moment. Then he laughed, and his laugh had an unpleasant ring. "Thou shalt have her, boy, for a plaything," he said, "though it cost me the price of a new rifle to placate the Mullah."

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Next evening Gulabai Nur was returning from drawing water. As was her custom, she lifted the heavy earthenware pot from her head half-way up the hill and put it on a projecting ledge of the cliff, which screened her from view from her home, while she eased her aching muscles.

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At that moment there was a shot from the opposite bank of the valley, and, as if this had been a signal, a veritable fusillade followed from the direction of her home above her.

As she snatched at her water-jar there was a rattle of stones at her side. With a gasp she turned, the jar still clasped in her hands, and found herself gazing into the evil smiling face of Gul Mast's youngest son. Before she could fulfil her intention of hurling the water-jar at him her wrists were seized, and it crashed harmlessly to the ground. He forced her slowly to her knees, then with a quick upward jerk he brought her hands together above her head, seized the fingers of both with his left hand, and with his right whipped his dagger from its sheath and placed the point against her throat. Thus did he dictate his terms.

Slowly the look of fury faded from her eyes and gave place to one of abject terror. Then with a sigh, symbolic of the whole spirit of fatalism of the East, the tension of her body relaxed and she fell a huddled heap at his feet—his slave thereafter.

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Meanwhile in his tower above Mir Badshah was fighting for his life. A hot fire was being kept up on his tower from the wooded spur to the south, but the sun was sinking and the light was none too good, and, although bullets were smacking regularly against the walls, none penetrated a loophole. He himself, with the lust of battle in his eye and murder in his heart, was returning the fire as best he could from one loophole after another. So the battle continued for an hour, while the sun set and the short Indian twilight faded into dusk.

Suddenly there was the roar of an explosion, and the one door of the village, in the wall opposite to the tower, splintered and burst inwards, its fragments burning

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fiercely. While his attention was concentrated elsewhere, some of his enemies had crept round the reverse side of his village and had blown in the door with explosive, stolen doubtless by labourers employed in blasting operations on some Government road.

To remain where he was meant certain death in the end, if not from a bullet then through starvation or thirst. But there was still time to escape if he was lucky. The storming party, after lighting the fuse, must have retired some distance to be safe from the effects of the explosion, and it would take them several seconds at least to arrive at the breach.

To open the door of the tower and to jump from there on to the flat roof of one of his living-rooms, level with the top of the village wall, was the work of a moment. Here he was protected by the tower itself from the fire of the covering party, but a shout and a burst of fire from them showed that his manœuvre had been detected. He now had only a ten-foot leap to get out of his village, where he might hope that the growing darkness would cover his escape. Yet he waited, his body crouched forward and his rifle half-way up to his shoulder. He had his reward. Believing him to have left the village the storming party made a dash for the door. Mir Badshah fired twice, and had the satisfaction of seeing the leading figure hesitate for a moment and pitch forward on its face into the burning embers, its arms flung wide.

Then he jumped. As he hit the ground two men came running at him round the corner of the wall. Before he could recover his balance the leading figure fired. The bullet hit his rifle fair and square and tore it from his grasp. As his enemy reloaded he slid over the edge of the khud and disappeared into the night—unarmed, friendless and alone.

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Next morning a heap of smoking ruins, with a charred and broken remnant of a tower standing stark in the dawn, marked the site of the village of Malik Mir Badshah, Kamber Khel.

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Meanwhile Khanai, knowing nothing of the attack on his home, made good speed to Peshawar. Here we see him three days later squatting on the ground in a corner of the city in front of a professional letter-writer, a greasy Hindu youth with the tools of his trade laid out before him under a dilapidated umbrella.

To the Eastern mind the sight of a professional letter-writer at work is no more incongruous than is that of a whole family trekking down the grand trunk road with bare feet, and carrying their shoes on their heads. Both are part and parcel of their daily lives. There he sits, the letter-writer, with his back against a wall or a tree in a crowded thoroughfare packed with humanity and with all forms of animal transport. Since every native of India invariably talks at the top of his voice, no matter whom he is addressing, the noise is deafening, but it worries him no more than do the flies which buzz in a perfect cloud round his face. His client squats on his haunches a foot or two from him, and their privacy seems to be absolute, for no one takes the least notice of them.

For the sum of four annas he will indite an appeal in villainous English, beginning " Respected Sir " and ending " for this act of kindness I will ever pray for your Honour's long life and prosperity." With equal serenity he will write a letter plotting a murder or discussing intimate details of family life. His discretion is boundless ; his sense of humour nil.

In the present instance the letter was in the vernacular and not without interest. Khanai knew something of

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the difficulties which beset the path of a recruit who tries to get leave, and accordingly ' told the tale ' to Mustakim to some effect.

The writer finished the letter, waved it two or three times in the sun to dry it and read as follows :—

" In the Province of the Punjab.
The Cantonment of Jhelum.
Regiment Number 200.
Company Number 3.
May this find No. 3556 Recruit Mustakim."

" Brother,—After salutations, be it known to you that great calamities have befallen our household. The wall of our house has fallen on Mir Badshah, our father, and he is like to die. Moreover, our sister is very ill and there is none to tend him. Those descendants of the evil one, Gul Mast and his sons, are even now planning an attack on our home, and without you we are not strong enough to resist them. If you would see your father's face again, and would uphold the honour of your house, take one month's leave immediately and journey with all haste to our home. Come by way of . . ." and here followed detailed instructions of the route by which he was to come.

Well pleased with his effort Khanai rose, licked the corner of the envelope, attached the stamp to the portion thus rendered moist and sloped off round the corner to post it.

He had barely disappeared when a figure, which had been sitting in the shade of a shop across the street muffled up in a dirty grey sheet, rose, and a striking-looking Afridi, with a red-brown beard and grey eyes, swaggered across the road and sat down very close in front of the writer. His right hand was hidden in his sheet. His

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left hand was outstretched and in it were two rupees. The writer looked up quickly at the sight of so much wealth. Then he froze. His eyes and mouth slowly opened and he goggled, for he found himself looking down the muzzle of a revolver, which was poking out of the Afridi's sheet a few inches from his face.

" Dog of a Hindu," growled the latter, " if you speak or cry out you die ! Do my bidding and these two rupees are yours. Tell me the contents of that letter you have just written." No other course than that of compliance even entered the letter-writer's mind. Tremblingly he repeated word for word what he had written for Khanai. Then, almost before he knew what had happened, the two rupees were in his lap and the Pathan was lost in the crowd. The latter's eyes were glinting with suppressed excitement. One thought kept hammering in his brain, " Khanai is a fool—a fool. The route he has told his brother to follow is the route he will take himself." Half an hour later he was in a tonga rattling its way out to Bara and the road to Tirah.

Khanai was in luck. At the post office he met a friend of his own tribe, one of a party who were leaving next morning for Tirah. With them he journeyed in safety and comfort for a day and a half. On the afternoon of the second day he unobtrusively left them and branched off up a side nullah to the right. For two hours he climbed steadily up a rough and lonely track, the sun blazing down on his back, then he left the nullah and struck off diagonally across the mountain-side. His objective was a solitary cave, known to few and situated near a small spring. He intended to rest in the cave for the early part of the night, and to cover the remaining ten miles to his home before dawn next morning.

He reached his destination an hour before sunset. The

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mouth of the cave was hidden from view by a small platform of rock, some fifty feet below which was the spring. After a good look round the country from a neighbouring spur, he slipped into the cave and sat down in its cool shadow to rest.

It had been a very hot climb and he was abominably thirsty. Discretion urged him to postpone his drink until after dark, but the thought of a two hours' wait, with cold spring water so close at hand, was more than he could bear. No one could possibly have seen him enter the cave, and it would be quite safe—well, anyhow, he would risk it !

He moved out of the cave and climbed up on to the platform. Then he made a noise between a grunt and a hiccough ! Slowly his legs gave until he was kneeling on the very edge of the platform. Slowly his body sagged forward, though he strove desperately to regain his balance, his hands scrabbling on the bare rock. Then, with a final lurch, he fell forward and lay still with his head and arms hanging over the ledge, while his rifle slipped from his nerveless fingers and went bouncing and slithering down the hillside.

Two hundred yards away a big red-bearded Pathan, lying in the shadow of a bush, reloaded his rifle and drew a careful bead on Khanai's recumbent figure. When there was no doubt that it would move no more he rose, stretched himself and yawned luxuriously, as a man will who has been lying perfectly still for hours in a cramped position.

Then he laughed. Gul Mast's eldest son was pleased with his powers of deduction.

. . . . . .

One last picture. At eleven o'clock on a June morning in Jhelum, Recruit Mustakim was standing, stiff as a

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ramrod, on the left of a small line of recruits at ' Reports,' which is the Indian Army's name for orderly room, where malefactors and men having petitions or requests to make are interviewed daily by their company commanders. Being a recruit, his immediate commanding officer was the Adjutant.

Mustakim's face was impassive, but his heart was in torment. Khanai's letter had reached him the evening before, and how was he to know how much of it was truth and how much exaggeration? Moreover, the morning had been an unfortunate one. It was fearfully hot, the thermometer was even then registering 110 degrees in the shade, and the worst of the day was still to come. He had spent three blistering hours that morning on the range, without a vestige of shade to shelter in, and, preoccupied as he was with his bad news, he had shot badly. He, an Afridi, who had handled a rifle almost since he could walk, had actually failed to qualify in two practices. The Sikh drill instructor in charge of his squad, who was suffering from the heat, had rubbed it in with a few sarcastic remarks, and some of the other recruits had sniggered. Then, to crown all, that same instructor had roundly abused him on the weary march back to barracks for failing to understand a remark addressed to him in what the instructor meant to be Urdu, the *lingua franca* of the Indian Army, but which was actually Punjabi, a language he was not even supposed to know.

The Adjutant, an overworked subaltern whose khaki-drill tunic was black with sweat, and who was suffering intense irritation from prickly heat between the shoulder blades, stood before him. He listened to the reading of Khanai's letter and Mustakim's request for leave with sympathy and patience, for he had no better recruit

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than this. When he had heard it he turned to the Jemadar Adjutant, his assistant.

" Jemadar Sahib," he said, " is not this the man whom you told me had such a fierce ' badi ' in his home ? "

" Sahib, it is ; and doubtless this letter is but an excuse to obtain his presence there for its furtherance," replied the J.A., who was well versed from many years of experience in petitions leading up to requests for leave.

" I'm sorry, Mustakim," said the Adjutant, " but you know the regiment's rule—no leave during recruits' training. And in any case," he added smiling, " I'm not going to have you going off and getting killed just when you look like becoming a good soldier."

" Ripar-r-t, right tar-r-n. Quick march ! " roared the Havildar Major, and the recruits were marched off and dismissed. Mustakim spoke not a word ; his face was like a mask.

That night he deserted His Majesty's service and set off to cover the three hundred odd miles to Tirah and his home. The details of his journey there need not concern us. Suffice to say that he succeeded in evading arrest, heard the news of the destruction of his village, the death of his brother and the capture of his sister before he reached home, and finally rejoined his father—another unarmed fugitive.

II.

The sequel to this story I heard about a year later from an old friend of mine, a Major in the I.M.S. He was one of the old type of regimental doctors whom one found before the war scattered in various out-of-the-way places along the frontier, where their knowledge of the Pathan and the amount of work they did for the tribesmen on both sides of the border, most of it unofficial and unpaid,

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made them a tremendous political asset. We met in a dak bungalow on the road up to Kashmir and leave. In those days motor-cars were practically unknown on the road, and we had both been jolted for eight hours in our respective tongas, two-horsed affairs with relays of ponies every fifteen or twenty miles. They moved at a hand gallop whenever the wretched animals could be urged to that pace by their drivers, and it was real hard work keeping one's balance in them without being precipitated face downwards on to the road. We were pretty tired, therefore, and agreed on a quick dinner and early bed, for we had to start at crack of dawn again on the morrow to suffer another eight hours of jolts and jars.

We felt better after our food, and with our legs stretched out at full length in a couple of cane-bottomed chairs in the verandah, pipes in our mouths and something in a long glass at our elbows we fell to bucking, with that feeling of utter contentment which comes to those who know that the heat of the plains is behind them for eight glorious weeks. It was not until our only bottle of whisky was finished that we realised with a shock that it was after midnight, and tumbled into our beds.

My Major friend in those days was in medical charge of an Indian unit scattered in outposts at a place we will call Bobilkand, on a part of the frontier far removed from Peshawar and Tirah. He was born and bred in County Tipperary, so I will make no attempt to reproduce his exact pronunciation, while I must, of necessity, omit some of his more picturesque phrases, but what he said was something like this—

" You know in that funny little place I'm in I'm civil surgeon as well as looking after the battalion there, and it's quite the most interesting part of my job. Faith, I get some queer cases in from across the border. Don't

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I spend the half of my time putting new noses on to women whose husbands have cut them off for unfaithfulness or the like. I had an old reprobate of a Malik bring in a young girl the other day, and a dam' pretty girl she must have been, too, before he cut her nose off. He told me that he'd done it because he thought she had been gallivanting with some young lad, but had subsequently found he was mistaken, and he understood I was grand at putting on new noses, and please how much would it cost? 'Well,' says I, 'there's two sorts of charges for that. I can do you an ordinary nose just to cover up that hole in her face for twelve rupees, or I can make a slap-up job of it, with a new bone and all, so that you'd hardly know anything had happened, for twenty.' The old sinner scratched his head and looked doubtful. 'Come,' says I, 'twenty chips isn't much to pay for a new nose for the woman you've misjudged.' 'Well,' says he, thoughtful like, 'I'm not so sure. I can get a new wife for thirty!'

"But listen now and I'll tell you the queerest case I ever had to deal with. Did you hear of that business at Dagrata?" (I had, as a matter of fact, but I thought it better not to interrupt the flow.) "It's the usual mouldy old mud fort with a company garrisoning it for their sins. The kote [1] where they store their rifles is up against the fort wall, the guardroom is next door to it and they have one sentry watching it down below in the fort and another on the roof above it. Well, one morning didn't they find a hole dug clean through the outer wall slap under the sentry's nose, and not a sound heard in the night! The Pathans who did it got into the kote all right, for they'd taken two rifles out of the arm-racks, but the queer thing was that they hadn't taken a thing away.

[1] Kote = storeroom.

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In the morning there were the two rifles lying on the floor, not another thing touched and no trace at all of who had done it.

" Well, a few days afterwards, when I was down at the Civil Hospital, in strode one of the finest specimens of a Pathan I've ever seen. A grand old hatchet-faced, hawk-nosed, grey-beard he was of about fifty, and as strong as a bull he must have been, for on his back, with no apparent effort he carried a young edition of himself. He said he was a Malik from just over the border, which was an obvious lie, for I know the sight of the people around those parts, but I hadn't time to think of it then for examining the son, who was in a real bad way. The whole of the fleshy part of his heel had been hacked away, leaving the bone exposed, and he had gangrene in a pretty advanced stage. The old man told me that the son had been bitten by a snake and that he'd operated, and could I save the boy's life ? The lad must have been in agony, but he never made a sound then or afterwards.

" I told them both that there was only an outside chance, and that was to amputate the leg above the knee. They agreed at once without any of that shilly-shallying about an operation you generally get from these creatures.

" I did it as soon as I could, but I knew it was too late ; the poison had spread right up into him. They were the grandest pair. For three days that boy fought his hopeless battle without ever a murmur, and for three days and nights his father never left his side. They got me so that I was wasting my time over what I knew to be a hopeless case to the detriment of my other patients. And when he died I shall never forget the look of dumb agony on the old man's face. He just sat and sat and sat by the bed without moving a muscle, till it was time to take the poor lad out and bury him.

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"' After that I got him a pass into the fort, and he haunted my verandah for days. Finally, one day he came into my office when I was writing and squatted down by my table. He first swore me to secrecy by all his gods and mine also, and then out came the whole story.

" He was an Afridi, Mir Badshah by name, and the boy who had died was Mustakim, his son. I suppose I was a fool not to have guessed that it was they who dug the hole in the fort wall. I probably should have if I had not been so upset at not being able to save the lad. He told me how they did it. They chose a dark night, with a bit of wind to deaden the sound, and they ' rendezvood ' in a dip in the ground about thirty yards from the fort wall. Here the old man stayed while Mustakim crawled forward. He had a bit of string tied round his toe, and his father held the other end of it. They had a simple code fixed. One tug by father meant ' danger, stop work.' Two tugs meant ' O.K., carry on.' Three tugs from either end meant ' come back ' or ' I am coming back.'

" Mark you they hadn't a weapon of any sort between them, and the only tool the boy had was the head of a pick without any helve. Well, he got there and started in to dig through the wall. Every time the sentry on the roof came along father gave one tug. Only once, he told me, were they in any real danger of detection, and that was when a new sentry was posted and, in a fit of keenness, had a look down over the wall. However, his eyes weren't really accustomed to the dark after coming out of the lighted guardroom, and he saw nothing.

" It took that boy five solid hours' digging, with intervals of toe-pulling and lying doggo, to dig that hole, but at last his pick went through. A little more work and the hole was big enough for him to squirm through. Very

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quietly he did so, and very carefully he removed two rifles from their racks. The next thing was ammunition from one of the boxes, which he guessed would be up against the farther wall, and his task would be all but accomplished. He stepped back a pace, a rifle in either hand, *and trod slap on a snake!*

"I suppose it had been living in a hole in the wall and his digging had driven it into the room. At all events it bit him in the heel and streaked out through the entrance he had dug."

The doctor puffed vigorously at his pipe for a moment. It had gone out long ago, but he did not seem to notice it. Then he drained his glass, half sat up in his chair and turned towards me. "Gad," he exclaimed, "but that boy had guts! Did I tell you he was a deserter? Well, he was, and the Army lost a fine soldier in him.

"Think of him there in that dark little room with enemies all around and above him, in agony of pain, with the poison shooting up his veins. He knew well enough it was a snake, for he had trodden on it with his bare foot. He realised that if he didn't move quick he wouldn't move at all, and that if he made a noise or was spotted it was odds on his father and himself being shot up. He had every excuse for losing his head and risking it, but not a bit of it.

"The first thing the old man knew of it was three violent tugs on the string, and next moment his son tumbled into the hole by his side. At that very minute round came the sentry on his beat. For five breathless seconds they lay there, their faces pressed to the ground, until the sentry turned and moved off out of sight along down the side wall. Then 'run,' says the lad, and the pair of them skedaddled off into the night.

"It wasn't until they had gone a couple of hundred

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yards that he told his father what had happened, and by that time he was getting cramp in his stomach muscles from the poison. I told you they hadn't a knife between them. The old man had left his dagger way back with his extra clothing and things. Well, something had to be done, they thought, and so there, in the dark, between them they hacked off that boy's heel with the cutting end of the pick, and the old man picked him up and carried him off into the hills.

" For forty-eight hours he was more or less comatose, and should by rights have died. Then the worst of the poison wore off and the old man was able to bring him by slow stages back to my hospital, but, as I told you, by that time gangrene had set in in his heel, and he hadn't a hope in hell.

" When the old man had got as far as this in his yarn I stopped him. ' And what the hell,' says I, ' were you two doing stealing Government rifles ? '

" Then he weighed in and told me all about his family feud, which started in the dim ages and was still going strong. He said some hard things about the treachery of his arch-enemy, Gul Mast, and somehow made them sound true. His family seemed to have had all the bad luck of the game, until finally, a few months before, Gul Mast and his pals had killed his eldest surviving son, carried off his daughter and burnt his village. He himself had barely escaped with his life, and had lost his rifle in the scrap.

" ' Sahib,' he said, ' out of all my family that left but my son Mustakim and myself—both homeless, both fugitives, and without a rifle with which to defend ourselves or money with which to buy one. If we left our dead unavenged our faces would be for ever blackened in this world, and after death we would burn in Gehenna.

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Rifles we must have, and the only way of getting them was to steal them from the Sirkar.

" ' And now my son, Mustakim, is dead also . . . and I am left alone. I am a Malik and cannot work as a common coolie for my food. I am too old to marry and breed more sons to carry on my feud. There is nothing left for me but to die. But before I die that spawn of the Evil One, Gul Mast, must perish—so shall my soul know peace.

" ' Sahib, you are a man and you understand us Pathans. As man to man, and out of the greatness of your heart, lend me a rifle and but five rounds, and I swear by Allah that I will return it by the next moon if I still live.' "

The doctor poured himself out another drink.

" Of course I refused, though it was hard enough to resist him. He was like a bit out of the Old Testament—Elijah wasn't it, or one of those old prophets ?—and he wouldn't take no for an answer.

" Just then I was called away to the telephone, which was in the next room. When I came back he'd gone—so, I discovered later, had my automatic pistol ! It was one I always carried around with me when I went out into the district, and when not in use I kept it in a drawer of my writing-table. The old heathen must have seen me put it in, and I left the keys in the lock of the drawer when I went out.

" You know the hundred and one people you have to report the loss of arms to ? Well, I didn't ! I kept quiet and wished him luck.

" A month or two afterwards I got a letter from him posted in Peshawar. He thanked me politely for the loan of my revolver, and said that, by the grace of God, he had slain Gul Mast and two of his sons with it. I heard, too, from an Afridi pal of mine, how he had done it. There's a little shrine just down below Gul Mast's village where

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some old scoundrel of an ancestor who was a famous raider is buried. Gul Mast used to go and say his prayers there on certain days in the year, and, as it was practically under the walls of his fort, he didn't seem to think any escort was necessary. Just behind this shrine was one of those flat mud threshing floors with a big pile of bhusa [1] stacked on the edge of it. And didn't old Mir Badshah manage to get there at night and bury himself, pistol and all, in the bhusa, knowing that Gul Mast would come there to pray next morning! He had just a little hole he could see through, and when Gul Mast, and his two big sons who came with him, were well down on their knees with their foreheads pressed to the floor, he gave a heave and got his pistol-hand free.

"He shot Gul Mast and one son in the back before they could get up, and put a couple of bullets through the other son as he scrambled for his rifle. All three stone-dead—*and* the old man got away with it, too, though they were shooting at him from all round within a few seconds. He got into the jungle on the khud side and just disappeared."

There was silence for a while after he had finished. Then a thought struck me.

"And," I asked, "did he ever send you your pistol back again?"

"He did not," said the doctor.

[1] Bhusa = chopped straw.

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VIII.

OUTSIDE THE PALE OF THE LAW.

THE high-pitched voice again pierced the silence of the night—a silence the more profound for the rattle of rifle-fire that had burst forth and died a moment before.

" Usman Khan-a-a-a, son of Sin, we have got you. We men of Dauszai are round you like a net, and in support of us are the Black Police and the Cavalry—ay, and the guns too, great big guns : and listen, brother-in-law of a pig, the District Sahib is here, and listen again, the Lat Sahib himself is with us."

This was too much for the raiders in the high-walled tomb. It exceeded, so they thought, the limits even of oriental embroidery—and through the stillness of the night came the cackle of unquenchable laughter. Then another high-pitched voice threw back—

" Smoke talk, O grandson of Perverse Desire, Smoke talk. Draw your swords, men of Dauszai, and bid your District Sahib and your Lat Sahib draw their swords and take us like men." And the voice broke into song—song with a lilt such as highlanders love. This is a rough rendering of what it sang :—

> " Holy War has been proclaimed :
> The Hadda Mullah leads us.
> Shall the Utman Khel hang back
> When God's own Army needs us ?
> See how the white women cower
> Pale and trembling in Peshawar."

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With a long-drawn quivering note the voice was dying when from beside it leapt several little tongues of fire, like squibs, on the dark outline of the roof of the tomb, and a bullet or two whistled through the trees above our heads. Then again all was silence.

It was a strange situation, in many ways an anachronism, though natural enough on the ever-troubled North-West Frontier of the Indian Empire. This is how it had come about.

. . . . . .

Usman Khan, of the village of Dauszai, some seven miles from the border, fourteen years ago shot his enemy in the prosecution of a family vendetta. Flying to the asylum of the adjacent hills, where no law runs, he was proclaimed an outlaw. Being a man of energy and character, untrammelled by scruples, he soon became the leader of a gang of bandits whose business it was to harry the countryside. It is in this way that so many of our troubles with Frontier tribes have arisen. The rigid law of British India, which, rightly or wrongly, makes no allowance for the hot mandates of Pathan honour, drives many fine fellows into outlawry beyond the border. There as the *protégés* (*hamsayas*) of the tribe with whom they find asylum, they must do something for their living: there is no culturable land for them, and they know no craft. One field alone is open, to raid the fat British Districts that lie at their feet. To this end the outlaws herd together: the young bloods of the tribe flock to them: adventurous and broken men are enrolled, for the hills are hungry; and a gang is formed.

Now the *modus operandi* of these gangs is after this fashion. On the dark nights of the moonless half month they come down, not in a foolish armed mob, but stealthily by twos and threes, with rifles ready but secreted. At

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the hour and place appointed they gather, furtively and with suspicion one of another. For it often happens that Judas is in their midst, paid to betray them. For fear of Judas the leader at the eleventh hour will often change his plans, or even retire to the hills *re infecta*. But when such fears have been allayed, the gang once assembled and the objective determined, they move off quickly in a body to the devoted village. As they near it, the desultory barking of the dogs on the roofs swells to a mad discord of alarm. The drowsy voice of a watchman calls "Who are ye?" By this time the village has been surrounded. Pickets of raiders hold the main entrance: outlying sentries watch for the coming of Police or Border Police. The body of raiders now move to the main street or *bazar*. Dogberry lets off his country gun and feels he has done his duty. The whole village is awake, but terror reigns and no man moves. Save for the frantic barking of the dogs there is no protest. Small wonder—for the village is weak and poorly armed; while here is a gang of desperate men armed with stolen Martinis and Lee-Metfords, and with 'Bandari,' Mausers from the Persian Gulf. The gang sets to work without any fuss or haste. First they fire a volley down the main street to clear the way and 'to encourage the others.' They then select a large house with a shop on the ground-floor and nice carved wooden lintel and window frames, indicated by a member of the village who has quietly joined them. For they seldom go to work without local assistance. They proceed to hammer at the door with threats. As an earnest of their intentions, one fires a couple of pistol-shots through the panels. This brings the miserable Hindu shopkeeper to his senses. With pitiful prayers for mercy the poor wretch unbars the door, his soft body and thighs shaking like ill-set jelly and his face contorted with terror.

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The gang enter. His wife is huddled in the corner speechless with horror. To tear off her jewellery and clothing is the work of a moment. Then the *bania* is told to disclose his hoard. He swears by the gods of his father that he has none. A few pricks with a dagger and he agrees to show it if they will but spare his life. Fumbling in the floor, he discloses a movable brick, beneath which lies the box of greasy notes and blackened rupees. The gang eagerly count them, and, disappointed at the result, one of the gang drives a knife hilt-high in the jelly-like paunch. With a groan the wretched man sinks down. The woman finding her voice shrieks. A pistol-shot stops that, and the gang pass on. At the next large shop a similar scene is enacted, except that instead of killing they take a Hindu youth prisoner with a view to his subsequent ransom. And so up the *bazar* they go leaving a trail of blood and death. But hark! there is a movement in the village. A shot rings out from a roof. The *chigha* or village hue-and-cry party are awakening to a sense of their duty. The raiders do not want any unnecessary unpleasantness. They have got what they came for, and so the retirement begins. A sleepy Muhammadan husbandman puts his head over his courtyard wall just as the gang pass. A shot—and the head disappears smashed by a Snider bullet. With a laugh the gang pass out into the night. Favoured by the friendly darkness and led by guides familiar with every step of the way, now over canal cuts, now through stony graveyards, the raiders move at a double for the frontier. The prisoner is pricked with a dagger if he lags; and in this manner they disperse before the Police or Border Police can come upon their tracks. In the meantime the Khan and headmen of the village have begun to swell with martial ardour. The *chigha* is finally collected and turned out—a motley crowd with a motley assort-

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ment of arms, a few Government Martinis, a few smooth-bore Sniders, a *jezail* or two, some country pistols and some swords and staves. Messengers are sent off to the nearest Police Post, and the pursuit begins. But before Police and villagers can join hands, the raiders are well on their way to the sanctuary of the tribal hills.

Such is a fairly typical account of a North-West Frontier raid. But it is only fair to say that often acts of the greatest gallantry are performed by villagers in defence of their homes and of their neighbours, and that the work of the Police, Border Police and Militia, especially the last, is often crowned with success in these dangerous quests. Further, it must be observed that the attention of these gangs is by no means confined to the weak and wealthy Hindus. With a splendid impartiality they loot and cut up their co-religionists and lay waste their homes. The District Officers are for ever on the watch for these gangs. Large sums are spent on the collection of information as to their movements. Telephones and telegraphs flash the news of their coming: traps are laid for them—but in the majority of cases the gang disappoint anticipation, raid in an unexpected quarter, and slip through our carefully placed road-pickets and patrols. Failing to cope with the raiders themselves, Government naturally turns to the tribe who give them shelter, and who by treaty obligations are responsible for the conduct of all persons resident within their limits. Tribal fines are inflicted and the bill mounts up. Pestilent priests step in and preach that raiding is holy war, and that raiders are *Ghazis* in the true sense. Fanatical feeling is grafted on the soreness caused by the docking of allowances and reprisals. The tension increases until the lawlessness of the gang infects the whole tribe; and overt acts of hospitality drive Government into punitive opera-

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tions. Troops go into the country, the *purdah* is raised; some blood is shed and much ammunition expended. Towers are blown up and hamlets are burnt; and all night the 'snipers' are busy, until at length the tribesmen are tired—as indeed are Government—and a settlement is effected whereby peace is ensured on this side at least for the next three or four years. This is the story of two out of three of our Frontier expeditions. It all sounds rather foolish and unnecessary. But the genius who will solve the problem of administering a border with fat settled districts on the one side, and with robber-haunted tumultuous hills on the other, without such incidents, will deserve after his name all the letters of the alphabet and more thanks even than a grateful country has accorded Clive or Hastings. Why not take the hills, you will say? But this is not a political discussion on the Forward Policy. It is only a brief attempt to describe the passing of Usman Khel, outlaw, to whom we must return.

Such then was the life that had been led by this sturdy ruffian and his merry men for the past twelve years. Dacoities indicating overweening audacity combined with extreme cunning were to his score. There was enough murder against him to have hanged him twenty times over. The countryside trembled at his name: alarmist reports of him hummed on the wires: a price was on his head. But he had outwitted spies and informers and cheated Judas—till to-night. And now at last by a chain of circumstances he was caught, though he knew it not, as a rat in a trap.

Having busied himself elsewhere during the winter months, Usman Khan suddenly decided, with some humour, to pay a visit to his own native village of Dauszai, and there to wipe out one or two scores which had been run up against him since his retirement to the hills. There

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was, for instance, the matter of the girl, his niece, who had been married without his approval to Yar Muhammad, and for whom he had never yet been paid. Now, "the custom of the country," as they euphemistically term the price of women, is a matter which nearly touches Pathan honour and Pathan greed. There was also the question of his confiscated lands. Was it seemly that Mir Gul, his enemy and the son of his enemy, should dare to lease them from Government for a song, when all others discreetly refused to touch them? Apart from these little private matters, there were fat men of substance in Dauszai who would repay a call. So gathering his men he set forth. They spent the day at the Cripple's Cave in Walai limits beyond the border, and starting at dusk came down through the foothills across the *maira* or stony skirt to the Canal Bridge. Here the utmost precaution was necessary, lest Judas had warned the authorities and an ambush had been laid. At first there was a false alarm, and they waited. But no one stayed them, and at early dawn they neared Dauszai—later by half an hour than they intended.

Now, outside the village of Dauszai, some half a mile away, is an ancient graveyard on a wooded mound, and in the middle is the tomb of that great and good man, Pi Mukhdum Sahib—though who this saint was, and what he did, no one seems quite to know. The tomb itself is of the usual stucco-sarcophagus pattern, but unlike most Muhammadan tombs it is—or rather was—enclosed in a stout rectangular building of sun-dried brick and mud with bastions at the corners, strong as a pathan village fort. Hither came Usman and his gang, moving warily in the early light. It was their intention to lie up here during the day, and in the first darkness of the night to assail the village and carry out their purpose, and thereafter to

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return to the friendly hills. But already some humble village folk were afoot cutting grass on the waste by the graveyard; and one of them, a wizened old peasant, saw and recognised Usman Khan, and in his slow mind pondered on this. Having cut his grass he returned to the village, and with mumbling, rambling utterance told his Khan what he had seen. His Khan, scenting trouble, must needs parley with the one other Khan with whom he was on speaking terms; and after much talk and much pulling at sobbing water-pipes of rough tobacco, it was decided to send a message to the Assistant Commissioner at Sadda, seven miles away. Now it happened that that day was a singularly unfortunate one for Usman Khan to have chosen. For, though Sadda is generally as empty of troops as a Devonshire hamlet, to-day it was fairly buzzing with them. For the Head of the Province was touring in state, and to-day his camp, under an escort of 200 infantry, 50 cavalry, and 2 mountain-guns, carried on great sturdy mules capable of going wherever the foot of man can go, had moved into Sadda from Smatzai, twenty miles away. Little did Usman, with all his cunning, dream that such a force was at hand to hem him in.

Ambling on his scissors-hocked steed, the messenger at last reached Sadda, and after parley with red-coated *chaprassis*, was admitted to the presence—and told his story. Usman Khan and his gang hung up in a tomb but seven miles away! In a moment the camp was buzzing. "To boot, to saddle!" The tired escort, who had just marched in twenty miles and were settling down comfortably to their cooking-pots, were alert in an instant, bustling to arms. Not a thought of hunger or weariness—every man intent on the possibility of a 'show'—and more eager than all, with the old lust of battle in his eyes, the Head of the Province.

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Taking the cavalry with us, and bidding the infantry and guns follow at their best speed, off we cantered over the most villainous makeshift of a road that ever scarred a survey map. Over the bridge of boats, sharp to the right through a watercourse, along a narrow greasy track, with a mud-wall on the left and a 7-foot drain on the right, over bridges made of twigs and dust, on we pushed. Now a riderless horse would flounder past in the deep irrigated fields alongside; now the whole cavalcade—and half the Khans of the countryside had joined us—would pull up abruptly before a yawning watercourse too wide to jump. At Kot we heard that the village *chigha* were engaging the raiders: at Ibrahim's well we could hear the distant firing.

Dauszai at last! with cringing panic-stricken Hindus and excited women in possession. For the whole Muhammadan manhood were out by Pir Mukhdum's tomb, joining in or watching the fun. Indeed, when it had become generally known in the village that the merciless Usman was sitting with his gang in the shrine hard by, the village *chigha* with commendable courage had turned out with their strange armament, and had thrown a loose cordon round the graveyard. All the afternoon a desultory fire had continued, *jezail* answering Martini, and Enfield answering Gulf Mauser. Leaping from our horses, which we tethered at the village, we made our way across the open to where a rough *morcha* shielded the general staff of the village army. Already evening was falling, and the February sun was sinking behind the ragged hills of the border. One thing was certain—that unless the cordon was drawn tight, Usman and his merry men would make a dash and break through with the first fall of darkness. By good luck at that moment a small contingent from the detachment of the grand old frontier

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regiment at Fort Rustam rolled up, warned, like ourselves, by messengers from Dauszai. Some Police, too, had arrived from Toti. With this increased force we moved forward to the graveyard. A bullet now and then whistled over us. But they were holding their fire for the night. Arrived at the wooded graveyard, within 200 yards of the tomb, the senior military officer began his dispositions and the cordon was swiftly strengthened all round. The ground, which sloped gradually up to the tomb, and was broken by the mounds of graves and strips of ancient wall, lent itself to the purpose. It was dusk, and the men moved quietly, so that the raiders in the tomb could have but little idea how many or of what kind they were—and it is my belief that they never realised until the morning that they were hemmed in by more than villagers, backed by Border Police. And then night fell, and with the darkness came a rattling volley from the tomb. A group of villagers behind the cordon split this way and that, save one, who lay very still on the ground with a bullet through his neck. How the blood welled out! It seemed rather shocking at the moment—but it was child's play to what we were to witness in the morning. It was not many minutes before the poor fellow had sobbed out his life, and his friends reassembling bore him off with a curious fatalistic indifference to the village.

Our men replied gaily to the volley from the tomb, and this evidently gave the raiders pause for thought. If there were so many rifles round them would it be wise to make a sally? Would it not be wiser to wait till the villagers were weary with watching? And so they remained in the tomb to their destruction.

The night fell clear and bitter cold. In our haste we had brought no greatcoats, and dinnerless, the cold struck us the harder. But the 'phit' of bullets keeps you

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from brooding on such trifles—and the deep, unhurried hate that being fired at breeds in man kept us fixed and alert. It is a strange sensation being under fire for the first time. It varies, of course, with individuals—from the desire to run away to the desire to get at 'em—the whole gamut, in fact, of emotion, from abject fear to seeing red. But with the ordinarily constituted man there is, I take it, an acute realisation of danger, coupled with a kind of elation—and the cold hand on one's stomach is counteracted by a glorious confidence in one's luck. Race pride does the rest—and the joy of a new experience. As the night wore on the infantry arrived from the camp, and later the guns. The cordon was further tightened up, so that with troops, Police and villagers, the investing force could practically touch hands the whole way round the graveyard. And this was the position when the raiders and villagers bandied words, and the voice from the tomb sang across the night—

> "Holy war has been proclaimed:
> The Hadda Mullah leads us."

The idea of rushing the tomb had been, of course, considered, but had been discarded as hopeless. It would have meant the sacrifice of many good lives, and would probably have failed in its object. And now that the guns had arrived, there was no such need. All through the night the gunners worked away, digging positions for the guns. And all night the rattle of rifle-fire continued. A Khan brought us some hot tea, *chapattis* and quilts from the village. Never did tea taste so good—and the quilts, though filthy beyond all Western conception of filth, were a welcome protection from the cold. It was a queer feeling to lie snuggling under this odorous covering

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listening to the varied talk of the fire-arms: that deep, booming report was from the tomb, a country gun probably; those sharp tearing cracks were our own short rifles; that again was the bark of a Martini; that thing that went over us, wailing and whimpering, was, doubtless, a piece of wire fired by a villager from a *jezail;* that nasty 'phit' that tore through the leaves of the tree above us was a Lee-Metford from the tomb.

And so the night wore on. It was arranged that the guns should open fire on the tomb as soon as it was light, if the raiders did not break out before. It was most probable that they would—and the suspense was trying. Gradually the sky lightened, and the false dawn coloured the east; darkness again—and then the real flush of the rising day. How big the tomb looked in the half light! The gunners were estimating the distance, which seemed to get shorter as the light strengthened. "About a full brassey," I felt inclined to advise, but realised it would be flippant, though true. Bang, bang from the tomb, and a bullet or two spat up the dust beside us—a narrow shave that made one the more anxious to hear the guns talking.

At last it was light enough—I could at last make out the crest on the gunner officer's forage cap, and I knew that when I could do that it would be time. The guns were laid, the order was rapped out—and with a tearing, rasping roar the first gun fired. The west portion of the tomb rose in a pillar of dust thirty feet in the air. As the dust subsided we could see the breach, and within great, grey, dust-coated figures scuttling away like giant mites in a giant Stilton. Shot after shot the merciless guns poured into the tottering building—a very blizzard of destruction. And still a shot or two answered from the tomb. Warily, like a rabbit coming out of a coppice, a raider emerged from a breach—only to leap back again, terrified by the

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rifle-fire that sprayed round him. And then a strange thing happened: Usman himself—whether driven out by the others in the hope that it might save them, or whether resolved himself to die in the open like a gentleman—broke from the building and came charging down towards the cordon. Suddenly he stopped, picked up a stone, whether as an insult or as a flag of truce we know not—and then, struck by half a dozen shots at once, spun round and fell. So died Usman Khan of Dauszai, outlaw, as he had lived, by violence. The guns were then moved up even closer to finish the work of demolition. Surely guns have never fired in earnest at such a range before! When nothing but a pile of *débris* remained, we advanced. There is always the likelihood of the survivors on these occasions selling their lives dear—and the rush must be prompt. The guns, however, had done their work well, and though there were several raiders alive and unhurt, they were too dazed by the appalling percussion of the shells to think of resistance.

It was a grim sight—a pile of *débris* some forty feet by twenty with every imaginable horror entangled in it,—a very shambles.

There a poor wretch buried to the waist and mortally wounded lay in his death agony, carefully lifting a brick from one side to the other, as if engaged in some game; there a face that was nothing but an astonished mouth—the rest had gone. Dinnerless, breakfastless, sleepless, do you think we turned faint and sick at such a sight? Not a bit of it! and though usually I shudder at an operation on a horse, I thoroughly and honestly enjoyed that butcher's shop of raiders. And if you think I am a brute therefor, go and be shot at all night, and see if you would not equally enjoy seeing your enemy cold meat in the morning.

It was a fine bag—20 killed, 2 wounded and 7 alive,

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more or less unhurt—most of these buried deep in the *débris* and saved thereby ; and they had with them a fine armament of Lee-Metfords, Mausers, Martinis, country guns, pistols and daggers. There is nothing very plucky, you may say, in killing a lot of poor raiders with mountain-guns. Perhaps not : nor is it very plucky to shoot vermin with a shot-gun. But vermin must be shot : and raiders are vermin outside the pale of the law—and pity is not for them.

The countryside came buzzing round, mad with delight at the destruction of this man-eater, and exuberant in their thanks and congratulations—and our ride back was a kind of triumphal progress. To quiet any religious qualms that might exist in regard to the destruction of the shrine, a handsome sum was promised to the local Khans to enable them to rebuild it in a manner befitting that sainted person, Pir Mukhdum Sahib.

" A jolly good morning's work," said the Assistant Commissioner, as we rode into camp.

" Yes," said the gunner ; " after all, men are the best big game."

" Sidney Street, East," murmured the policeman.

The Head of the Province was humming to himself with an expression of great content. I think, though I cannot be sure, that the words were—

> " Four robbers came to rob our house,
> And now we wear their trousers."

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IX.

RETALIATION.

THERE is a small feeding-place, buried in Soho, where, on occasion, you may find gathered together those who have retired from the outer fringes of the Empire and have unbuckled the harness: just such gatherings of spasmodically reminiscent cronies as those who swopped yarns with the immortal Brigadier Gerard in that snug little pub in Toulouse. Here, one evening last winter, Gillespie, late Colonel of Gurkhas, told the tale that follows.

Omitting inverted commas, hear him tell it, inadequately though this scribe may have memorised it and haltingly written it.

I.

Wali Mahomed Khan, Pathan, of the Achakzai clan which lies astride our Afghan Border area, was one of the finest specimens of natural manhood whom it has been my good fortune to know. We called him 'Wallu' for short, and I don't think half a dozen of us even knew what his full patronymic was.

Born and brought up, in the wild Pathan fashion, in the mountain country which lies between one of our large frontier headquarters and the Border itself, he never forgot how the first outstanding event in his life which led to such a mixture of events afterwards was when he

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left his wife in charge of the headman of the village and set out to make a better living in the *khassadárs*, the irregular tribal Levies with which we supplement our forces on the frontier. He has no history in the Levies up to the time when he got his first leave and returned to his home among the parched crags of the Khoják; but, with that return, things begin to move with rapidity. Briefly, he seems to have found the scattered fragments of the Seventh Commandment lying thickly on his door-step, the wife cowering in a corner, and the erring *sardár*, who had heard of his imminent arrival, making a hole in the horizon.

What happened to the wife is not known, though a guess is permitted. What happened to the *sardár* transpires from what Wallu told us, years after, in one of his rare moments of expansion. Wallu took French leave and a 'borrowed' rifle from his Levy, and hunted the delinquent. For two years, uphill and down-dale of the wide Borderland, he hunted him, and finally into India itself, his main object being to head him off from taking refuge in Afghanistan; wherein he was successful, for at last he caught him up where he was working on the new Sukkur Barrage, in Sind, and where he had risen to the position of foreman of works. As Wallu describes it, "I found his hut, sahib. I watched it for a week, and then at midnight I crept to the door, entered and stood at the foot of the *charpoy* where he slept. A small window stood at the head of the bed and gave a little light. I waited a while, and then I took him by the foot and shook him gently. He awoke and sat up. I said, 'Gul Zamán, do you know me?' He sat and blinked, and said nothing. I cut downwards, so——" and Wallu made the expressive gesture from elbow to finger-tip with straightened palm, which all Pathans make. The sleeve,

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falling from the raised forearm, exposed the magnificent muscles; there was no need to tell that the stroke needed no repeating—" his head fell off sideways, and he remained sitting, spouting blood. I wiped my *tulwár* on the bed-clothes and walked out into the night."

So far, so good: a perfectly normal story of the Borderland.

The sequel also follows normal Border traditions. Gul Zamán had a brother, one Turabáz Khan, whom we afterwards came to know as Tor Khan, for short; and Wallu found himself with the usual blood-feud on his hands. On Tor Khan (*vice* Gul Zamán, *obitus sine prole*) had fallen the headship of the village, and Wallu found himself in the minority of one and condemned to roam. Landless, without wife or chick, with nothing much of brains and only a great gaunt body at his command, he commenced his wanderings, his eye always skinned for the vengeance which he knew would pursue him in any place, at any time of day or night—relentless. He is rather vague about this part of his history; he seems not to be too proud of a period of frank vagabondage, though, even from this, merry incidents emerge. To wit, what he in the end frankly admitted to be his joining a jovial gang of moss-troopers who wrecked a goods train on one of the steeper gradients of the Bolán Pass, whence he brought away nothing more useful than a big bullet-hole in the right leg, the gift of the escort in the guard's van. He seems to have reverted to the Levies after that, for there is a record of a quarrel with the Jemadar, whom he dragged from his horse and pounded on the ground *after* getting that very useful sword-cut down his back, from neck to loins—and here, a little shyly, he draws his shirt over his head and shows the great ragged weal, eighteen inches long, the blood from which must have

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made an unholy mess of the two of them as they fought on the shingle.

Thanks, probably, to never being in any one place for too long, and to having no regular habits, he escaped the attentions of Tor Khan, who never caught him bending, though there were ample indications that the blood-feud was not going to be allowed to come to a standstill. But, whatever the reality of the danger, it seems to have been at least temporarily scotched when Wallu, blowing in from nowhere, came boldly into the battalion office, asked for the C.O. and requested the job of *chowkidár*, or armed caretaker, to the target-house on the rifle-range outside the North Fort, the same standing in what, for discretion's sake, we will call the frontier station of Baldak.

As he stood there, upstanding and dignified, speaking as man to fellow-man across the Orderly Room table, I couldn't help admiring every inch of him. Barefoot, he stood well over six feet, and a little over-broad for true proportion; deep-chested. His arms hung from his shoulders in the loose and careless curves of the strong man. His great bony face and beaky nose, and that massive headpiece which, as I often found in later days, was a placid and unshakable rock, crowned a bull's neck hardly in keeping with hands and feet which showed that stamp of breeding to be found only in the best Pathans, whose outlines would have been a joy to Praxiteles. He answered my questions in a big level voice with a merry twitch at the end of it; and once only his vast cheek-bones wrinkled to a grin such as is rarely seen on a fellow-man in these days of hard thinking.

Wah! But here was a Man.

"Anybody know anything about him?"

"Yes, sir," from the Adjutant; "X. and Y." (two

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officers) "use him as *shikári* up in the hills, and say they'd trust him with anything."

Thus Wallu, armed with one of the battalion buckshot Martinis, found himself installed in the target-house on fifteen rupees a month, plus rations, and with little to do but keep the rifle-range appliances in order. This he did with the loving care which we afterwards found that he bestowed on any arm, or any appliance connected with fighting, so that even the target-paste came in for a share, and was of a smoothness and clearness unknown to the rather catchemalivo ways, in these matters, of Johnny Gurk. His realm measured a thousand yards by fifty; it was bounded at the far end by a stop-butt, of no great height, since the wide plains of Afghanistan lay just beyond, where a flying bullet is of no more concern than the song of the short-toed lark. His headquarters, near the Fort, were the brick-built target-house, whose walls had, for the slayer of Gul Zamán, the inestimable advantage of being bullet-proof. Here he dwelt, in complete peace and brotherly concord with the little Gurkhas of the garrison, their squat Mongolian faces never failing to break into a grin when gazing up at the cheery countenance of one who narrowly escaped the fate of becoming a regimental pet.

II.

Some eighty miles north-west of one of our principal frontier headquarters, over a range of stark and craggy mountains, and out in the middle of the flat yellow desert beyond, lies the outpost, fortification or cantonment of Baldak.

It lies astride the main camel-route into Southern Afghanistan, where the grim mountain passes of the northern Border fade out into open desert, and is wedged

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tightly up against the line of whitewashed cairns, which, by our self-denying ordinance, spells 'thus far and no farther' to the English, but not to the Afghans.

It is roughly an oblong enclosure surrounded by barbed wire, containing a fort at the northern end and another at the southern, each manned by half a battalion of Gurkhas. Between the two lie the tangled purlieus of the bazaar—an entrepôt for the camel-caravan trade from the north and beyond; and, in close proximity to it, the open cantonment, where stand the unfortified and unprotected bungalows of the battalion's white officers. The bazaar is a perfect thieves' kitchen of cut-throats. They drift in and out, secure in the knowledge of the British 'live and let live.' Here men go to earth and lie hidden when a tribal feud gets too hot, or when the crudities of Afghan punitive justice are reaching out for them; and—the law is unwritten—as long as they cause us no trouble, we do not trouble them.

Apart from the civil Kotwál and the native Political Agent, two local minor functionaries under the orders of the Political Officer at headquarters, who are supposed to be responsible for the local tribesmen—and who at this time most certainly were not—the Gurkha bazaar-guard keeps order. A strong party moving about with rifles? Not so. Reinforced by the power of the unwritten convention, the Gurkha bazaar-guard is one man, neat in close-fitting khaki, polished belt and one and a half cwt. of side. He is armed with a walking-out cane, and is lord of all he surveys for the month of his spell of duty. True, the Babel knows that we could, were we so minded, wipe the whole place out in one day and cook our dinner on the ashes; but even that hardly gives backing to what I saw once—a long thin string of a hundred trail-worn laden camels conducted by wild tribesmen; and a little

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Gurkha as high as a pile of sixpences and the picture of boiling fury, standing in mid-road, waving his cane and damning the tall camel-men all to heaps for taking the wrong turning into the main street. The camels wound themselves up into a confused block while the tribesmen gradually took in what was meant; whereupon the whole cortège presently unwound itself, turned wearily about and went back to the right turning. What? All right; I tell you I *saw* it happen.

So much for daylight. But after dark it is a different matter. The universal law of the Border is that, when darkness reigns, every man who owns a house gets inside it and shuts the door, *tight;* and he who has no house gets behind a rock. For then the terror that flieth by night has a nickel nose, or one of lead, or, all too frequently, one blunted at the tip and sawn so as to give those ghastly wounds which we associate with expanding bullets. Curfew? The Border makes its own curfew, and the quick shot takes the place of a challenge.

Seven miles off, on the Afghan side and astride the camel-route, stands the mediævally constructed but quite useful Afghan fortress of (let us say) Kadanai. Baldak and Kadanai face each other across flat desert, and have, officially, nothing whatever to say to one another, though each is keenly conscious of the presence of its opposite number, very much as are two dogs, of equal size and fighting weight, living on opposite sides of the same street.

There you have the cantonment of Baldak; and when I add that, in addition to the mixed crowd of those whom you might style interesting characters, but whom we, on the spot, called damned cut-throats, whom we had to cherish in our sandy bosom, the Afghan frontier stretched as an open line of whitewashed cairns across the desert

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a couple of hundred yards off—and the wire entanglement was, through lack of funds, no obstacle at all—you begin to see that the situation ran mainly on hope, or on a rather stiff and strained mutual respect, whichever way you prefer.

. . . . . .

The particular phase in the annals of Baldak with which we have to deal occurred when the cantonment became a gathering-place for a couple of divisions of all arms which took the field against Afghanistan in the 'war' of 1919. There was nothing much in it, except that our entire circus went out one morning to Kadanai, at that time the Afghan headquarters, and, with unnecessary noise and vehement H.E., blew it to bits. Thereafter, both sides sat down and looked at each other, three perfectly good Afghan armies in three separate camps across the way, ourselves in Baldak and the ruins of Kadanai, each side unable to leave its ground, because, had it done so, it would be advancing into an area of which its enemy held the water-supply. One incident only lightened the tedium. A young and impressionable flying officer, scouting over enemy headquarters, discovered at some distance in its rear the camp of the Commander and that of the outfit of ladies with whom he took the field. He discovered also one damsel, bonny as a rose-leaf and conspicuously interested in the machine and its occupant when flying low. Shortly afterwards he obtained from down-country a large two-pound box of chocolates, and once more flew to the enemy camp, bent on presenting his gift to the tantalising unknown.

There she was, as usual.

Now, I am no aeronaut, but I believe that in those days our airmen went at about sixty miles an hour; anyhow, this fellow was travelling at a pace of knots, and the

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lady wasn't travelling anything in particular. He flew low and hard towards her, waving the box in the air with the cheery gesture which spells "Catch!" from China to Peru. As he dropped the box she made a lap in which to catch it.

She caught it right enough, poor thing. . . .

Next day a flag of truce came in from old Thingummy across the way, with an infuriated protest at our making war on women. It nearly drove the three Afghan armies into movement, and now serves its purpose in driving me back out of side-issues and into the main current of what I am trying to tell you; for it was just at this juncture that my bearer bolted and was seen no more.

Is there anyone in this world more helpless than the sahib without a servant?

Now, the Border was never a popular spot with servants, and they usually had to be heavily bribed to come there at all. So that when I found myself servantless I was rather up against it. No question of sharing with anyone else: the Indian servant serves one man only, and him half-heartedly. The battalion being 'back in billets' at Baldak for the moment, the question became acute. Its discussion at mess that evening suddenly stimulated a brain-wave.

"Wallu sometimes does for us, in a rough way, when he takes us after *gadd* in the hills. Why not try him, sir?"

Instantly the merry notion bit. In a moment the mess orderly was doubling down to the lines. By the time the wine was on the table and post-prandial contentment reigned, up the drive leading to where our table was laid, for coolness, in the open, came striding Wallu, his powerful figure half as large again in its outline against the glowing western sky, his treasured Martini slung over his shoulder and his heterogeneous collection of rags swaying mightily

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in his long elastic strides. He came to the table and squatted on the ground beside the subalterns seated at the far end, and a hubbub of cheery chatter arose. As soon as anyone could get a word in edgeways, it was " Don't sit *bukh*-ing here, Wallu. The C.O. wants you."

Up rose Wallu, and swung up to our end.

" Stharé ma shé, sahib ! " said he, with a waved hand, half-salaam, half cheer-oh !

" Khwár ma shé, Wali Mahomed," [1] I answered.

He squatted once more, coughed rather self-consciously, blew his nose (quite neatly) in his fingers, laid his rifle across his knees and awaited my pleasure.

You would say at this point that we had forgotten to offer him a drink Quite wrong. Wallu, like all the best Muslims, not only did not touch alcohol, but plainly loathed the stink of the heady stuff. Nor would he soil his great leathery hillman's lungs with tobacco smoke. The conversation therefore proceeded directly.

" My bearer has vanished, and I can't get another. Will you take it on ? "

The question had to be repeated before the slow ripples of dawning comprehension grew into the wrinkles of a wide and embarrassed grin. " What, *me ?* Take on *sirdar* in the Karnél Sahib's household ? What do *I* know of house service ? "—and the embarrassment slowly hardened to a queer hostility. For a moment the mind's eye visualised a large goshawk being asked to take on the job of cleaning out the canary's cage.

He dug his toes in. Sheer obstinacy, reinforced by a look round the table at his skinny down-country co-religionists who, flitting so quick and silent-footed about the table, drew their white coat-shirts away from contact

[1] " May you never be tired ! " answered by " May you never be poor ! "

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with him as they passed, but who, in their mean souls, were deadly afraid of him.

"*Come* on, Wallu. *Be* a man. Take it on. You'll get twice the pay you're getting, and the *izzat* of being C.O.'s bearer"—thus from the subalterns at the end of the table, his close friends, whom he trusted. That at last made him feel more homey. He sighed. "It's an order, I suppose. When do I begin?"

Next morning he turned up at the bungalow, where, washed and shaved and fitted out by the regimental tailor in the resplendent muslins and velvet of a Pathan of the upper classes, he slowly and reluctantly learnt the job of indoor service. From first to last he hated it all—all, that is to say, except the job of bossing the other servants and that of cleaning the shikár rifles and guns. He was never tired of the wonders of the telescopic sights and other gadgets, and loved the heartening feel of the heavy blued metal and the sharp snick of good mechanism —his long, thin, aristocratic fingers busy with oil-rag and cleaning-rod, with lock and bolt and barrel, till they got that indefinable dull glow which speaks of warm steel in harmony with its owner. And when, after an hour of it, he could find nothing more to do to a rifle, sitting and nursing it across his knees he would look out with distant and contented gaze over the desert, and sing a little crooning tune to himself.

. . . . . .

The Afghan 'war' of 1919 fizzled out rather than ceased. Dyer, down at Amritsar, had quelled the insurrection in the Punjab, and a mixed collection of sedentary busybodies was sitting in judgment on his actions. The untidy raggedness of the commissioned ranks was being sorted into something like pre-war shape by the ruthless axeing which acted as a wholesome purge to the Indian Army;

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and what should have been a restful ending to a perfectly good period of five years' world-war strain, developed into a housemaid's job of broom and dustpan. Anti-climax, and a mixed time for a C.O. Kadanai had been patched together and handed back to its former owners, who installed as Governor a *persona* politically *non grata*, a minor official who had emerged rather rumpled from a palace plot in Kabul and had been exiled to this first-cousin-to-Jehannum, accompanied by a disgruntled and showy Persian wife with expensive tastes.

The year was on the turn, and the hot weather approaching. We always knew when the turn of the year was on us by the uprising of the 'sand-devils,' which would last steadily through the remainder of the hot weather. A sand-devil is a whirlwind which, generally on the stillest days, gets up from nowhere and travels four or five miles before dismembering and whoofing off into nothingness. It consists of a strictly localised vortex, like an inverted cone, and anything up to two hundred feet in height. It travels slowly across the desert, rotating with incredible speed on its own axis, and gathering up anything loose which may lie in its path—tents, blankets, even cooking-pots—whirling them to the top, where they spin, helpless, unable to come down till the devil has blown himself out. The devil himself is hot desert sand, and should you get in his path you must hang on tight to something firm lest you and your clothing join the mixed exhibits upstairs; you shut your eyes and try to hold your breath as the roaring darkness envelops you; you are then conscious of the crowning and quite inexplicable devilry—the overpowering and nauseating smell of almost solid human fug. Where on earth the devil picks up this last peculiarity has always defeated me, since he blows in from the untainted desert and is composed of wholesome

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sand; but all the crowded tenements of all the fetid slums of Benares, packed together, could hardly equal it: the breath of the very Pit. These devils sweep through cantonments about twenty times a day, and, as we have noted, their arrival coincides with the opening of the hot weather.

The lady of the party here saw fit to join the scheme of things. When all other rightminded memsahibs were fleeing homewards before the advancing heat, this one decided to terminate a five years' war separation, and to land in Bombay with a complete and extensive fit-out for home-making, knowing nothing and caring less about the—to say the least of it—peculiar conditions of the Frontier. Stop her? Might as well try to stop a Bandersnatch. So, flinging prudence to the winds, I made a rapid dive for Bombay to welcome the caravan, leaving the bungalow all-standing in the capable charge of Wallu.

We dumped the kit with the Bombay agents, and took the first two months' leave in five strenuous years—trekking about, deliberately shunning a permanent address lest official business should pursue, and revelling in the historical antiquities of India's famous places: the sightseeing which we, living in the midst of these wonders, never seemed to have previously been able to achieve. Another story altogether; no place for it here. At the end of the time we gathered up the mountainous kit, wired our impending arrival to Baldak and set out to rejoin.

The warmth of the welcome prepared, when at last we drove in through the wire, dispelled most of the memsahib's uneasiness, which had been steadily growing as the lush down-country landscapes changed to scanty vegetation, bareness, and finally, stark desert. Foremost was Wallu. Forgetting the status of master and man—

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never, indeed, very obvious between us—he shot out his great paw and gripped mine. "Stharé ma shé, sahib!" he shouted; "jóriye? khushhálye? mazbútye?"—while he pump-handled my hand in both of his, in rhythm with his greeting, laughing all over his face and half-way down his neck like a great schoolboy. And then finally, reassured, "Shukr de!"—*that's* all right, then—and turned enthusiastically to the mountains of kit.

"Hi, Wallu, come here. Come and be introduced to the memsahib!"

He turned about and took a pace forward; and the great body of a man, bunged up with wounds and healthy sin and the gorgeous life of the open Border, stood like a self-conscious child caught stealing jam; his head hanging, his hands behind his back, scratching the heel of one bare foot with the toes of the other. For all his deep copper-colour, I'll swear he was blushing.

The little scrap of a thing gazed up in whimsical amusement at his towering bulk—she who could have stood with her two feet on the palm of his hand while he raised her, erect, to shoulder height—and, friendly but properly ceremonious, "Salaam, Wali Mahomed Khan, Achakzai," said she.

"Salaam aleikum," whispered the great gawk, and scrabbled in the sand with his bare toe.

Silence.

Then, mass of confusion though he was, and hating it all, he pulled himself up as straight as a ramrod and made her just such a bow as Essex might have made to Queen Bess.

"Khush ámada éd!" said he in clear and courtly welcome.

And fled.

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III.

The bare elements of furniture had been got into the bungalow against our arrival, the dry bones to which the contents of the packing-cases, arriving a week later, were to give substance and life. For carpets, there was all the store of Persia, Turkestan and Bokhara on which to draw, clean from fresh-opened camel bales down at the caravanserai. Meanwhile would we mind pigging it for a day or so? Thus, our *locum tenens*, the Second-in-Command, who came in for ten minutes and a drink in the back office. In the first half-minute whisky was forgotten and pipes went out, while, in the fewest words which would compass the wide ramifications of a complex subject, he laid bare the sudden change in every aspect of the local Border problems which had taken place during the two months of my absence.

The subject needs a little prefacing if we are to understand how, as a matter of habit, sahibs and their families had, up to this time, been able to live openly and unprotected in cantonment bungalows at a distance from barracks or from any kind of military guard—safe in the knowledge that the rough chivalry of the clans would confine warfare to the crags and valleys of the traditional fighting grounds, and how the changing spirit of the old Border warfare had, all at once, made this habit a definite and dangerous back number.

Listen now while I attempt to set out a matter not easily described nor understood in this England of ours—a thing full of anomalies and contradictions, but the very bone of the bone to us who lived and worked in the land.

To begin with, Border warfare as we knew it best had absolutely no ill-feeling in it. It was a war of hard-

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trained bodies, each against the other; a war of keen eyesight and straight shooting; a war of perpetual vigilance and of quick wits, where the man in the valley knew that at no time during daylight was he free from the hidden eyes which, from the hills above, watched his every movement; and should he grow careless or slacken off, or, worst of all, indulge in any *habit* when living, moving, or fighting, then was his head a gift to his enemy. Success or disaster came with equally unexpected suddenness: a rearguard surprised and bunched together in difficult ground; a group of tribesmen caught in a cunning trap of their own devising; an ugly rush with knives on a camp at midnight, when the attackers went clean through wire, abattis, tents, mule-lines, and out the other side before you had grasped that they were there, leaving red ruin in their trail; or, the same tribesmen lying out and sniping the camp in the darkness, and the scattered flashes growing inexplicably fewer till the *chapáo* party of barefoot little Gurkhas came in again through the picket-line, their kukris red with the blood of the snipers stalked and slain in silence. Through it all, the marksmanship at long range through the clear and dry desert air of the gaunt mountains, the steady hand and the clever judging of distance. And if they did cut up our dead and wounded, very rarely left out for them to cut, well, didn't we burn their villages and ring-bark their few and precious apricot and mulberry-trees—though making very sure that the village was empty before we burned it? And if they had a rather *macabre* taste for rifling our fresh-made graves and turning the pitiful contents out to the vultures, didn't we, not seldom, bury in a grave a dummy in a blanket, containing gun-cotton slabs, not a few, and tricky contact-wires, whereby the gravediggers flew to Paradise, their limbs not all together but singly and one by one?

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Each war was a war with the gloves off as long as it lasted, where brain and eye, hand and body, all worked together at the top of their form; and, when it was all over, no rancour, no ill-feeling. Orakzai or Afridi, Mohmand or Achakzai, you could meet any of the many clansmen in Peshawar Bazaar, in Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, or Quetta, each with a useful rifle and a bandolierful of the latest and best smokeless, and you could pass the time of day to each, openly and with a grin. Each and all would, occasion serving, gladly cut your throat, but he wouldn't be rude to you.

First and last, there were no grudges in it, and I think the core of the matter lay in the fact that we never made war on one another's noncombatants. It was good rough chivalry such as the old class of sahib loved well, carrying self-denying ordinances on both sides, which neither we nor the tribesmen ever transgressed.

Then came 1914, and the Great War. The sahibs who had learnt the Border so long and so patiently were scattered to Flanders, to Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, East Africa—anywhere where the new war called them, and their hill troops with them. Very, very few survived, so few that never can they leaven the new generation. It is difficult to describe adequately the irreparable loss. Only we, who have lived in both periods, know the deprivation in the loss of that wonderful knight-errantry which not only made our frontier wars such a grim delight, but which, for over half a century, added definitely to the clean ideals of English youth.

In 1920, when England was settling comfortably into peace, the Borderlands blazed out into open rebellion, and all sorts were sent against them—all, that is, but those who knew the trade and its traditions. Each new brigade inevitably came to grief, and the clans armed themselves,

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as never had they armed themselves before, with the rifles of the slain. A crisis supervened, and the alternative lay between an irresistible uprising through the length and breadth of the Frontier, or turning against the tribes the methods of modern warfare and the new tricks learnt from the Hun.

Perforce, our folk dropped explosives on them from the sky; dropped incendiary bombs on their villages whence their women and children had not had time to escape; set up long-range heavy howitzers and shelled their village areas with six-inch high-explosive shells, which soared over the intervening mountain ranges in their blind flight, and dropped crashing on to crop lands where men and women worked; we machine-gunned them from aeroplanes; every unchivalrous trick we used against them —everything except gas.

Our people succeeded—after a fashion—and, even then, incompletely. But it was a poor success that left an embittered and vindictive feeling behind it—where tales of mangled noncombatants grew no less in the telling. I am convinced that it was directly and solely due to this new and vengeful feeling that the slow-growing indignation of the clans presently blazed out into the Kohát murders and the kidnappings from cantonments, the undefended bungalows of which had till then been respected by the tribesmen. It made Peshawar, Bannu and Frontier stations farther afield no place for an Englishwoman except in the near neighbourhood of barracks. Had the Hun but known it, he, in teaching us the mechanism of unmanly destruction, dealt us a deadlier blow than ever he did by bombing and poisoning us; for he destroyed the old large-heartedness of the Borderland. Till now the last of the old knight-errants are the gaunt and tatterdemalion hillmen who, in this year of

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1929, have waged such bitter and successful war against the mongrel internationalism and modernisation of the old Afghanistan.

We, of the old Border, hated it all, but were powerless in the face of facts ; we, who could feel as did Chandos—or was it Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche ?* or du Guesclin ? I dunno ; some splendid old fighting man, anyhow, who hanged on sight every arquebusier he met, for the use of that villainous saltpetre which was slowly destroying the knighthood of Christendom. The measure of our bitter sorrow is the measure of our love for the old things clean and of good report ; and now they are dead—dead and gone—and nothing on earth can bring them to life again.

So the rankling grudge had drifted south to us of the Achakzai territory. But the thing which had given pith and point to the new rancour, so far as we were concerned, and which subjected us to what eventually came to be a series of vindictive retaliations, was, I am certain, the unfortunate incident in which the airman and the box of chocolates figured so prominently—and yet so innocently.

So now we understood the tale which the Second-in-Command told, while the memsahib in another room was sluicing off the mixed desert which had invaded her, all over.

From the first he made no secret of the fact, that, for the last two months, he had been up against it. Fine soldier though he was, he yet knew nothing of the Frontier. He had been transferred from a down-country regiment in the reshufflings which, at the end of 1919, filled the depleted commissioned ranks of those battalions which had made a habit of being in the thick of it all. He had never seen rock or sand or hawk-faced clansman before the time of his joining us ; he differed, indeed, from the

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old type of Border officer who knew how to keep his temper and never made war in driblets. Briefly, there was something like open feud between the garrison and the clans, and the trouble was growing; an embittered state of affairs in which we held the undoubted mastery by day, but the tribesmen made things almost impossible for us by night; the reprisals growing more acute as each side chalked up one to spot, or one to plain, in fairly evenly balanced sequence. It was all right for the garrisons in the forts; but the bungalow area, accepted hitherto as neutral ground by the tribal code, was—as it had always been—out in the blue. As I have tried to describe.

Failing conclusions with the forts, the clansmen had fixed on the bungalows. The thin end of the wedge consisted of petty thefts. Of these no notice was taken. The thefts grew greater in volume and in frequency, property being hard to safeguard in houses built of unburnt brick and furnished with doors and windows from the woodwork of which, under the ravages of dry heat and white ants, all life and resistance had long departed. The Barrack Department had no money for repairs or replacements; doors hung insecurely on stout hinges the screws of which failed to bite; locks consisted of the usual chain and staple, anchored together by a heavy padlock, but easily wrenched asunder with the two-foot-long marlinspike which is the usual Border equivalent of a jemmy. This inserted point foremost in the hasp, a slow turn of the wrist is given and—pf!—chain and staple softly and suddenly vanish away, after the manner of Boojums. When to this is added the fact that Border thieves have been known to lift a sleeping sahib by the four corners of his blankets, deposit him, still sleeping, on the floor, fold up his camp-bed and go off with it;

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or, more credible because more often done, lift a tent by its fly-ropes and leave the sahib to continue his sleep *en plein air* till the rising sun shines on him and wakes him; when they have a trick with a horse which will allow of their stealing him from his stable and taking him away, treading as softly as his captors; when all this, I say, is considered, there is credence in the reputed fact that Pathan thieves have that sixth sense which they share with cats and which allows of their doing the most incredible things in pitch darkness—a sense which surpasses and, for a time, seems to replace sight, smell, touch, or hearing.

There had been a series of these burglaries or raids; and, in every case, the thieves had got clean away with the loot, out of cantonments, through the wire, and, by a few steps, over the border. Nobody knew, or nobody would tell, whose hand was in it, though persistent rumour had it that the Governor's expensive *khánum* in Kadanai Fort, over the way, was furnishing her quarters more in accord with her notions of good taste than her husband's pay would allow, and was gradually acquiring all our best possessions.

So much for the Second-in-Command, who confessed that he found the situation unmanageable; and what did I propose to do?

Sit down for a good long think? Or lose my wool and do something foolish? Not a bit. Knowledge of Pathan psychology discounted what were, after all, only pin-pricks; these small irritations, it was obvious, were only a curtain-raiser; the really important features would develop later. But, meanwhile, there was no good reason for allowing them to continue. Questioned, had there been any shooting? The sentries at the Forts had been told to fire without challenging. Had they been given

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buckshot Martinis and told to reserve their fire till they could shoot to kill? No; apparently not. (H'm; so the Pathans had been sticking to the time-honoured sequence of sniffing round the edge of trouble and seeing how far they could upset our tempers and our judgment before going on to the real business; the diagnosis was easy.) Any sahibs done any shooting? No; in each case the mischief had only been discovered at daylight.

Next morning I sent for the Civil Kotwál, and explained that this sort of thing had got to stop, one-time.

"Fidáyat shávam!" with a deprecating politeness; "may I be your sacrifice." Translated, it meant bide-a-wee; or, the matter is out of our hands, whichever way you like to take it.

Anyhow, we turned to other things; and, whether *post hoc* or *propter hoc*, the raids ceased. Personally, I was inclined to think that the tribes were waiting to see if the returned incumbent would do anything sudden and awkward; and were marking time meanwhile. While I, thinking things over, and seeing clearly the direction which events were taking—though hand-tied both by custom and by order till the other side made the first move—blessed my stars for the day, and the brain-wave of the day, which brought Wallu, sturdiest of henchmen, within the scope of my domestic arrangements. In what was coming to us all, little time would there be for my own concerns and for those closely dependent on me; and on him, great lumbering mass of laughing courage, would devolve . . .

H'm.

Anyhow, of how we came to rely on him, and of the indispensable part he played in all that followed, let me —risking discursiveness—tell exactly as it happened.

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Since one thing led to another, it is difficult to know how to shorten it.

. . . . . .

The household kit from England arrived a few days later. In my absence at work, the lion's share of the job fell on Wallu, who was in his element, heaving bulk and weight about with a merry sweating impartiality. " Here, give a holt, you ! " and a heave all together, and in the stuff would rumble and bump—packing-cases, barrels, trunks and what-not—into the verandah, which was soon knee-deep in straw, shavings and brown paper.

When once the gear was in, and things growing ship-shape, the household duties had to be brought into some sort of ordered sequence. The minor servants fell into their appointed grooves at once. But Wallu was the problem. Far from clumsy, yet absolutely untrained, it was obvious very early on that he was impossible as an indoor servant in a memsahib's ménage. His bulk alone was against him. He dwarfed everything within sight, and towered head and shoulders above the others, on whom he looked down both literally and figuratively. The memsahib had that in her eye which verged on a sentence of dismissal ; but the sahib had in his eye something more in response, which showed that the splendid old rough-diamond was going to stay at any cost, house-trained or not ; and the memsahib's tact saved the situation. We would invent a status for him, with the rank—devised for the occasion—of ' major-domo.' He, in all his glory of towering muslins and gold embroidery, should be taught to stand in the verandah with a silver salver, take the cards of the callers and show them in. The drill was simple, though to Wallu it was as irksome as harness to a zebra. The first day, when the Second-in-Command and the two captains called, all went well, though Wallu's

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hearty " Come along in ! " savoured more of the owner of the show than of its retainer. He accompanied the callers into the tiny drawing-room, where the memsahib received them, stood there, to the imminent danger of tea-tables, what-nots and other flimsinesses, and prepared to take a share in the conversation till shoo'd out by the diminutive lady.

Next day the subalterns arrived. Wallu spotted them from the verandah, gave a whoop of joy and strode eagerly down the drive to meet them. An hour later they, in their glad-rags, were still sitting on the bench under the mulberry, used as a rule by the orderlies, in animated conversation with the new major-domo about some shikár ploy, past or impending, the why and the wherefore of their coming clean forgotten ; what time the *mem* waited in an empty drawing-room till the standard calling-hour had long passed, and then drifted in to lunch not a little puzzled at the absence of the expected visitors.

That was the end of the major-domo stunt. No other job seemed suitable to the wild Pathan. The lady refused to give him any job which involved tidying or handling breakables. " My dear, he'd crunch them all to bits in those great hands of his." Wherein she was wrong. I could have told her of the marvellous quickness and neatness of touch which the colossus shared with other really strong men. Anyhow, he was banished to the male end of the house, where he drifted about as before, doing some good and no harm—the good being the wholesome satisfaction which another man got when, thirsty, sand-smitten and exhausted, he came in at evening and met the great calm bulk in the dressing-room, or heaving great *ghurrahs* of tub-water about in the bathroom, or standing over the shifty syce who weighed out the ration for the horses' evening feed. He came as a breath of clean desert

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air whenever you met him, did Wallu ; and to no one so much as to the tired man. "Stharé ma shé"—hardly was there need for him to say it !

He avoided the memsahib. Gradually, unobtrusively and quite courteously, he refused to have anything to do with that part of the house. I think he had all a Pathan's dislike for womenkind left lying about loose ; a definite impatience, probably bred into him by generations of ancestors who, daily carrying their lives in their hands, needed a clear deck on which to mind their dangerous business, and kept their womenfolk shut safely away. He was alacrity itself when sent on a job ; but he generally managed not to be there when she wanted him. Looking back on it now, I realise that Wallu was that very rare and very lovable thing, an undiluted and wholly sincere man's man.

IV.

It was somewhere about this time that the trouble with the tribesmen of the place recommenced. One night, the last-joined subaltern lost his entire fit-out of saddlery. It was Sowter's best stuff, and some kind uncle must have been generous to him : a clean sweep, right down to the hoof-pick, and even the stable-collar stripped from the horse, which, however, was not taken. He lost his temper, vowed to pot the next man whom he saw moving at night, and had six rounds of the best with his revolver at an indeterminate shadow at the bottom of the compound a night afterwards. Two nights later he woke with a sudden burning pain through his leg and the sound of an explosion in his ears, sniped neatly from behind the low compound wall as he lay on his camp-

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bed in the open, where each officer slept, for coolness. We patched him up and sent him, under escort, in to headquarters to heal.

Ve-ry well, says I; if you *must* carry it to extremes and pot sleeping sahibs, you shall have it! Forthwith the order went out that anyone found moving after dark, and not carrying a lighted hurricane-lantern, would be neither stopped nor challenged, but forthwith shot. The native Political Agent was called up and notified; a shrug of the shoulders; "Balé," and a salaam; and off he loafed, every inch of his insolent backview proclaiming "no business of mine, of course; but two can play at *that* game." I nearly called him back, to say that the edict *included* all Government servants, of whatever ranks and of both colours. Damn the blighter! He knew more about the state of affairs than he cared to tell; I wondered whether he knew that the Sardár of Kadanai was, at that moment, as we suspected, peacocking round with a brand-new Sowter saddle between himself and his scrawny mount.

Two nights went by, and nothing happened. The third night, one of unusually dense darkness, bang! ba-ba-bang! ba-bang!!—rapid fire from somewhere near the North Fort. The field-telephone answered inquiry with the information that "they'd got somebody." So they had. Daylight revealed an old and nearly toothless man, a small boy and a donkey-load of mixed wares, who had crept in through the boundary pillars on a mild kind of smuggling enterprise, to avoid the octroi post by day. Most unfortunate. It seemed about as heartless a thing as could have been done. But there it was; the weakness of the position lay in the fact that in the midst of declared inter-state peace, we were at local war; and, I ask you, *how* was one to notify local war regulations,

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however precautionary, to scattered tribesmen on the other side of an open frontier line?

Anyhow, we could only hope that it would not happen again.

Promptly came the answer. During mess, the uproar of a rifle-shot at close quarters, a splintering of window-glass and a scattering of plaster on the opposite wall, made a sudden and simultaneous interruption to the general conversation. Nobody hurt. But, a few hours later, as though to add insult to injury, the only pair of bullocks which drew the iron conservancy-cart—an indispensable if malodorous adjunct to all cantonments—was discovered to be missing. Their hoof-tracks led to the frontier line, and passed on into the blue.

And who, or what, was to draw our cart?

Really, you know, when I realised that the bazaar, when it heard of our loss, must have rolled in convulsions of rib-racking laughter (the full details, by the way, are omitted), I could hardly repress a giggle myself.

Here or hereabouts it was borne in on me that a lady, interposed between lamps and open windows and verandah, was almost too much of a target. In those days the Kohát murders were still to come; but it was obvious that the old sanctions were going or gone; that dirty work was gradually creeping in to swamp the old fair-play and that all the clean romance of Border fighting was weakening; so that, by evening, heavy curtains had taken the place of the bonny muslins. If they must snipe, at least they should snipe blind. Furthermore, Wallu, divested of gorgeous trappings and once more back in his dingy and nondescript garments was, at his own request, on the prowl with the second-best Mauser-Rigby. It was at about this point that he threw off the depression of house-service and became his own joyous man once

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more. This, after all, was a thing he could understand. No slinking about behind walls or round corners. He moved as silently as a cat, but with head up and chest out and that marvellous sixth sense of all Pathans tuned up till it twanged inside his soul like a harp-string. If ever the old blighter said his prayers, which I doubt, he must have stroked the barrel and butt of the Mauser, on those still and wonderful starry nights, and thanked his God for the very joy of life.

He needed, indeed, to walk warily, and to know when to shoot and when not. For by this time we had begun to take measures ourselves. The garrisons of the two forts were insufficient to provide standing guards—in addition to their other duties—on each and every bungalow, the mess, the dâk-bungalow, the military works godown and all the rest. Had some been guarded and others not, the unguarded ones would have been a cockshy to the prowler, and it would have been unfair. So we had to rely on moving patrols, a poor substitute, but apparently better than nothing. Theirs was the job of prowling round cantonments with buckshot Martinis in the hope of catching the lurking sniper or the silent-footed thief. Counsels, alas! of perfection. Unless he knows, by rifle-flash or other sign, where to look for him, how may a man on the move hope to find a lurker, still as a mouse and indistinguishable from his background? The patrols, again, had to be only a few men. A group would have been a gift; nor could more than one patrol be on the move at any one time, lest two patrols should meet in the dark and fratricide ensue.

The situation was worrying to a degree. With cantonments turned into an open battleground from dusk to dawn, none of us could sleep outside his house. We did not sit up, teeth all a-chatter. We slept as tired men

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sleep; but the business of getting to sleep inside an overheated bungalow in the infernal after-dark temperature of a desert summer shortened the temper of each of us for the next day's work, and things began to get unsatisfactory. It was about this time that somebody—not, however, myself—suggested tentatively to the lady of the station that she would be happier in the comparative safety and coolth of headquarters. The suggester didn't try it twice. In spite of the fact that if ever she hears I said it my name will be mud, I here and now register my solemn belief that, on the whole, she was rather enjoying it all!

. . . . . .

Real grim trouble now began to descend on us. I am never tired of saying that we were most unfairly handicapped—and with an open frontier which we were debarred from crossing, but which was treated as non-existent by the tribesmen, and a bazaar which we were unable, through Civil regulations, to sort thoroughly, were powerless to fix the guilt on anybody unless we caught him red-handed. So the score began to mount up against us. A Gurkha orderly, lying up in the long grass of his sahib's compound on the chance of getting someone, was half-blown to bits by an explosive bullet. The patrols were incessantly being sniped, and twice it was our job to bring in badly wounded men; nor was there ever a sign or glimpse of the snipers bar the sudden yellow flash of the shot, and, the spot being marked down and rushed, no trace of the sniper. Every now and again the programme would be varied by lootings. Once the entire kitchen fit-out of the dâk-bungalow vanished; once the flagstaff in front of the mess, sawn almost through in the night, descended with deadly effect on the orderly whose job it was to run the ensign up at dawn—a piece of sheer

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mischievous devilry. The regimental servants, down-country Mahomedans of the poorer-spirited type, got restive and threatened to bolt. My pair of one-rat-power Goanese, imported at much expense and trouble from down-country, came with telegrams in their hands announcing simultaneous deaths of fathers and mothers, requiring their presence urgently in Goa. Yet, as I say, by day you wouldn't have known that anything whatever was wrong, and everything, down to the single unarmed bazaar-guard, functioned smoothly and normally.

Now, it is not easy to explain it clearly, but the fact remains that there was no remedy except such remedies as we ourselves could apply. It would have been useless, nor would it have been within our dignity, to squeal to headquarters. On the Border you are expected to run your own show and never—if it can possibly be avoided—run crying to mother. In the old days, with the old type of sweaty, shirt-sleeved, pipe-sucking staff officer of the Frontier, we could, without loss of caste, have gone up to H.Q. and talked it over. The result would have been strictly unofficial, but very unpleasant, pressure put upon the Politicals, and some, probably quite guiltless, headman of Pathans would have been held responsible, in person and in property, that the nuisance stopped, suddenly and definitely. But though he is, thank Heaven, back with us again at long last, in those days the old type of staff officer had gone aloft on the wings of gas, H.E., and other sudden departures from the normal; and his place had been taken by a stop-gap swarm of very junior and strictly temporary ignoramuses, who barely knew the language of the people with whom they dealt, and who, in the face of anything like an emergency, were absolutely useless.

Fact is, we were the victims of circumstances; the altered circumstances of the Border, the altered methods

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of the New Army. We were caught in the tumbled turn of the tide, where the waters ran all ways at once and things had not settled into any one particular direction. So we just had to makee-do, and hang on in silence; and, whatever else happened, neither to panic nor show the tribes that they were worrying us. Not for coined gold would we have admitted to a crowd of murderous fly-by-nights that they were either interfering with our peace of mind or doing anything to take us out of our normal stride. *That*, at least, was not the way to hold the Border.

But each consecutive score-up against us made the next score easier and more probable. Once, for a while, we got a breathing-space. We managed to catch one of the snipers red-handed. He put up a whirling struggle for it, but the Gurks hung on grimly and in silence, and presently we had him trussed. We had been at infinite pains to catch one of them alive and get information out of him; so, treating him with the utmost impressiveness to be got from mystery, we marched him, bound, the five marches into headquarters, where we handed him over, *not* to the Politicals, nor to our own H.Q., by any means (they would merely have given him a lengthy trial and a term in prison), but with a strictly unofficial note to our old friend Buchanan of the Police, whose name was a terror throughout the Border where he had already put in nearly thirty years' service. The sequel was hardly anticipated, nor, thank the Lord most humbly, was it any of our devising; for Buchanan (that, by the way, was not his name) handed the man, still stubborn and insolent, over to his native subordinates, to be kept in the cells and questioned at frequent and regular intervals. He emerged in the end, free and without a mark on him, and was turned adrift into the hills, where he wandered at will and was well cared for by the clans as one of the

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" afflicted of God " ; for he was raving mad. I found out afterwards that, taking it in turns, Buchanan's native constables had kept him awake by prodding him in the ribs with ramrods, and had allowed him no sleep, day or night, for a fortnight.

V.

The queer part about the whole trouble was that my bungalow escaped raiding, nor was any shot fired at or from it. Wallu, when not prowling, slept on his charpoy, fairly and frankly in the open compound, the rifle between his knees, and nothing I could say would dissuade him from what seemed like asking for it. " Lor' bless you, sahib," or the Pathan equivalent, " they won't touch *me.*" And gradually I began to see that though the tribesmen were keen as mustard on getting either sahib or Gurkha, they thought twice before incurring all the infinite ramifications of a tribal feud which might ensue if they put a bullet through Wallu. True, nobody knew who his relations might be, or who would take up the quarrel. I believe, as a matter of fact, that by this time he was the only survivor of his family ; but he was a bit of a mystery, having blown in from nowhere, as it were, and nobody knew anything about him. Truly, to see the great bulk of a thing swinging freely along the roadway with a straw in his teeth and " you be damned " in his eye, anyone might have believed that he had a whole clan at his back, somewhere over the skyline, and he lord of the whole push. Nor might anyone guess that he himself had spent many years in uncomfortable places distant from his home, in the small matter of Gul Zamán, deceased, and was even now on the unceasing *qui vive* owing to the presumed survival of Tor Khan, the brother ;

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which, to my mind, makes his carelessness about sleeping in the open all the more inexplicable.

For all this I neglected no precautions. At nightfall our entire fit-out of silver, glass, china, cutlery and anything else which we thought the Sardár across the way, or his expensive lady, might fancy were securely padlocked into one godown at the end of the verandah near our bedroom—securely, that is to say, as far as any security might be within those worthless walls and behind those barely cat-proof doors. For the rest, I trusted to Wallu, and to our increasing immunity.

A further precaution was a form of drill, in which, on the first sound of a shot fired, the memsahib was immediately and without hesitation or question to lie flat on the floor, and stay there till told to get up, thereby freeing the fighting portion of the ménage and giving it the elbow-room and field of fire which it needed.

But Wallu was our mainstay. He swaggered about by day, lord of creation, and sometimes would absent himself for hours, knowing that the house would be perfectly safe in the daytime, though by now we had a total of five casualties to mark up, and nothing to set against them but the witless wanderer in the hills. The incident of the smuggling party went by default. The Pathans, naturally, counted it a bull's-eye to us ; but we were busy trying to forget it, and, in our secret souls, were thoroughly ashamed of it, so it lapsed from the score.

. . . . . .

I had long ago given up asking Wallu to help by keeping his ears open and gathering information of impending raids or snipings. He was too obviously in the enemy's camp for his fellow-Pathans to let him gather the least inkling of what intentions were afoot. Apart from which, it seemed almost certain that the raids were carried out

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from across the frontier line, either with the connivance or at the direct instigation of the Sardár of Kadanai, who was credibly reported to have bought, at his own price, the proceeds of every raid; while the snipings might have been anybody's work, since they rarely coincided with the lootings. But about this time I was seated on the edge of the verandah in company with Wallu, with whom I was discussing the situation; Hamish, the Aberdeen, squatting on his hunkers up against Wallu's baggy clothing, Wallu with his arm round the dog in clear defiance of Musalman precept which holds such animals unclean.

"I got hold of a bit of a rumour yesterday, sahib. The Sardár has a new recruit, a man they say is the cleverest thief on the Border. Nobody knows his name, but they say he's from my part of the world"—nodding in the direction of the Achakzai crags, hull-down on the horizon —"and I ought to know him. Can't think who he can be. They say he's boasted he will clean out the whole cantonment, and is coming in to the bazaar before long to get the hang of the place. He's over in Kadanai now . . ." and he rumbled off into contemplative silence.

Long pause.

"You'd better potter about the bazaar a bit for the next few days and see if you can spot him. If he's from your part of the world you may be able to recognise him, and, if so, we ought to be able to round him up."

"I wonder . . ." and, with a puzzled "shaitán tamán!" (the whole thing's the very deuce an' all!), he hove himself up on to his feet, spat contemplatively and strolled off to his quarters.

. . . . . .

What happened, two days later, I pieced together from the accounts of the Gurkha bazaar-guard and from several

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eye-witnesses. The versions hang together in all details, so I may as well tell it just as it happened.

Wallu had gone off to the bazaar, as suggested. He was squatting in the main street in front of one of the open booths which, in the daytime, crowd the roadway in front of the shops, and was fingering over the wares while he chatted to the owner. Presently, from the direction of the South Fort, an uproar approached rapidly, and, looking up, he saw the father and mother of all sand-devils come whirling up the main street. Way and away on top of it spun a Gurkha hat and a government blanket, gathered up in passing over the Fort. The din was terrific. Strollers fled for shelter; booth-keepers grabbed their trays and spread-eagled themselves over their wares, while the loose matting roofs of the stalls blew to pieces; doors and shutters banged; small boys were knocked over, and dogs yelped and scattered into side-alleys; all who could hung on to anything solid within reach, and huddled together as the whirling breath of the Pit bore down on them with the clatter and roar of an express train coming through a dense fog. Wallu crouched low and bent his head between his knees, while for a full half-minute pandemonium raged in the thick darkness around him.

The devil went roaring on its way, pursued by yells of laughter and *décolleté* jokes as it was seen that the hat and blanket at its summit had been joined by two voluminous pairs of frill-bedecked feminine plus-fives gathered from a house-top, where they had been laid out to dry after washing. "Is it from *thy* housetop, Sher Dil?" "Nay, from *thine*, Abdul Majid?" . . . The fun grew fast and furious. But he whose Rabelaisian roars would have overtopped all—whose salty and shouted jest would have turned the sand in men's eyes to mud with the very tears of their laughter?

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Silent.

Slowly they gather round him: a tiptoe circle. Don't touch him. Don't get too near, lest men should point an accusing finger! Each tries his best to be inconspicuous. . . . *Who did it? Who*, in the darkness of the sand-devil, did it? Whose is the axe. . . . For there lies the herculean bulk of Wallu, his fallen puggaree tangled in a heavy hatchet, his hair streaming in the foulness of the running gutter, and a great ragged hole in his head where his skull has been crushed in.

"Tora," whispers somebody; "Tor Khan" . . . and they melt away, soft-footed.

Oh-*ho*; so they must have known about it all the time!

. . . . . .

The Gurkha bazaar orderly, full of importance, bustles up. "Hullo? Man dead? Who did it? Here, you *janwars*, help me have a look at him. Give a hand here. Hustle!"— and, with his cane, he herds the reluctant onlookers forward. "Turn him over, you," to a trembling Hindu shopkeeper; "who is he?" He peers. Whistles softly. "Wallu! Of the Karnél sahib's house! Now you've been and gone and done it. *Now* you've torn it, you ——s. Here, catch a hold!"

It takes half a dozen of them to lift him, the Gurkha nursing the shattered head tenderly. They place him on a *charpoy* and carry him to my house, whence, mercifully, the memsahib is absent. I meet the little procession on the verandah. "Wallu! What mischief has the old devil been up to now?" No explanations; the shortest of inspections; "Quick! Off to the hospital with him" . . . and, hot-footed, I precede him.

By a mercy, Macdonald, our doctor, is there; a man skilled in all the sudden blugginesses of the Border.

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He fingers the crushed and matted head carefully. "Lord," he whistles, "here's a job and a half." . . . . Five minutes later, "Hope? I dunno. These chaps are damned tough, but I think he's booked. I'll tell you more when I've had a good look at him." (Pulse? No pulse. Cold. . . .) "Come back this evening, sir, and I'll tell you what I think. We'll do our utmost for him. Poor old Wallu," as he bends to his task, the hospital staff busy around him.

So homewards, with a heavy heart. By the Lord Harry, we'll make somebody smell hell for this!

By evening I return. There lies Wallu, cleaned, stripped of befouled clothing, lying on a ward-bed under a clean white sheet, his great head propped on a pillow and massive with swathe on swathe of white bandaging. Great blue valleys circle his sunken eyes; his wide jaws hollow; a grey pallor over all; his aquiline beak points stiffly to the ceiling as the great gasps of breath come hurtling out through his chalk-coloured lips. Lying there, helpless and on the verge of death; that magnificent specimen of lovable manhood. . . . *Dieu qui le fit de ses deux mains.* . . .

"We've had to trephine him. The only chance for him. Bad case."

"Will he live?"

"I'm afraid not. It would take the strength of three men to get over what *he's* been given. You see . . ."

Details.

Once more homewards; two of us, since the memsahib, dainty, trim and very frail-looking against the desert background, has been waiting outside the hospital door. She slips her arm through mine.

"You'll get even with them, won't you, Bill?"

"Please God!" says I.

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VI.

There's nothing very much to be done. I lock up the old chap's quarters and then stroll down to the office, send for the Adjutant and concoct new measures. Not, indeed, in a spirit of personal retaliation, nor in any sudden loss of balance; but because, so far, things have followed an awkward but definable course. Raids are raids, throughout the Border; also, shootings and snipings are the common lot of Frontier mankind; but when it comes to making personal war on the head of the show, the question of *izzat* (what they call 'face,' farther East) is involved; and if we let it slide we might as well chuck our hand in and give the other side best man.

With many little sums in addition and subtraction, and a close comb-out of 'employed' men, we find it will just about run to it. No more of these moving patrols, to be a gift to the lurker and to miss the raider. A complicated plan ensues, but one which will give a stationary escort to every bungalow and building not within the walls of the forts, each escort to have an absolutely free hand to use any and every feasible measure against the common enemy. One reservation I make, to save dwindling self-respect. There shall be no guard on the C.O.'s bungalow. The Adjutant stares.

"I don't think you're wise, sir."

"Never mind. I'm old enough and ugly enough to look after myself. Besides, after what they did to Wallu, I expect they'll avoid me like the devil. Make it so, will you?" And the orders go forth.

So, back home to dinner and bed; an automatic under the pillow, and a barely avoided breeze with the wife who refuses point-blank to go and sleep in the Fort.

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Poor old Wallu. . . .

. . . . . .

Do what we would, we could not catch up with the situation. For now raidings and snipings synchronised. There would be a shot at an open bungalow window, and, while all guards in the neighbourhood turned out to hunt the sniper, a godown or a stable would be forced and the contents would vanish. Johnny Gurk is a superlative fighter, but his brains are worth about a capful of porridge; never could we make him understand that the man on the move is a gift to the man behind cover, or that each group had to look after its own show and nobody else's. A couple of bangs, and the air would be thick with bloodthirsty Gurks, hurtling like meteorites through space from all directions, and converging on an empty but still warm patch on the ground, while half the cantonment lay deserted and unguarded. Even after we had managed to get them to keep still, losses went on in a mysterious way. The Second-in-Command lost his first and second chargers in the same night, stolen from under the very noses of the guard; next night, in spite of redoubled precautions, his entire vine was stripped of grapes, a piece of pure mischief, since most of them were found abandoned out in the roadway next morning. Then cantonments got a bit of a rest, only to be broken by five minutes' rapid fire, down the main street of the bazaar this time; the shopkeepers lying flat on their floors behind the heavy wooden shutters. The state of affairs was becoming chaotic, and was rapidly degenerating into a condition where Pathans with grudges against each other were beginning to pay off old scores, and saying the raiders had done it.

A mixed time altogether.

So down to the hospital for the daily visit to Wallu.

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He had moved neither hand nor foot nor eyelid since the operation; but still he lived, if living you could call it, and still Macdonald watched over him, with little spoonfuls of milk, or egg, or the pernicious brandy, which the sufferer would have spat out had he been conscious, forced between his blue lips. Hypodermic injections. There was nothing they would not do to keep the fluttering life within the four corners of its magnificent casket.

"Will he live?"

"By all the rules . . ." a headshake.

Home to the wife, who asks the same question, to get the same headshake. It is she about whom one frets most; she is beginning to look peaky, though there is never anything but the cheeriest of smiles. We bar and shutter everything and take a good look round the compound, stables and servants' quarters. I slip a clip into the automatic, tuck it under the pillow and we turn in.

B'jove, thinks I, if only we could catch this one blighter, this king-pin of all our troubles, who is at the back of all this intensive work, I really think we would scotch the whole business for good. Lummy, *what* a score it would be . . .

. . . . . .

With uncanny persistence the raids continued, though by now the sniping in cantonments had dwindled to about a shot a night and no harm done. The Gurks had learnt the drill. But the bazaar suffered, and buzzed like an angry bee-hive. Had they been able to spot the nuisance-mongers or their leader, they would have torn him to bits with their bare hands. Some one master-mind was obviously directing things, and each day brought fresh rumours of who it was that led them. Gumándar Shah, Qurbán Ali, Musa of Bostán? Names multiplied, and anybody who had a grievance against

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anybody in the hills or across the frontier line, whispered his name abroad as the common enemy. The raiders were ubiquitous and quite undefeatable ; they came like wraiths and vanished like smoke.

Another visit to Wallu, who by now puzzled the doctor. He showed us an X-ray photograph of the head. You never saw such a mess. . . .

" Trephining relieved it ? "

" Oh, yes ; he'd have been dead a fortnight ago but for that. But the brain ; look here . . ." and he pointed.

Hope, then. There *must* be hope, even if the doctor's knowledge forbade it. Homewards, with a little of the gloom lightened, and an added relief at a clear full-moon night, in which, at least, peace might be expected. But, lord ! to think that the old virile chivalry of the Border should have degenerated into this damned bang-snatch-and-scatter game ! It was enough to make one pack up and go home to raise eggs on a poultry farm !

Same old round of the compound and, whether broad moonlight or not, testing locks and bolts. The dog to his usual corner in the dining-room near the precious godown, and ourselves to muggy slumber in the furnace heat of the bedroom.

Suddenly from unmeasured oblivion, we wake with a start, to hear Hamish barking furiously. Grab the automatic, and into the dining-room. What is it, old dog ? Hamish flies to the door leading into the verandah and scratches to be let out. A quick footstep outside, and the sound of something heavy and glassy being dropped and smashed, as I shoot back the bolts and stumble over an overturned deck-chair, Hamish darting into the open godown with angry and excited yelps. Quick—after the dog—he's on to something ! Into the godown, whose outer and verandah doors hang groggily from smashed

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hinges, and the moonlight shows a scene of desolation. Floor, cupboards, shelves, everything ripped open and stripped bare. Raiders! Thought so! But the dog's on to them. After him. Round the corner of the bungalow, and into the back compound. A group of three, stooping over a load to be lifted. Bang! The sickly stink of bad Pathan powder, as a chunk of mud brick is dislodged and cascades down. Pull up quick. Panting I raise the automatic, and pull the trigger, *hard*. Nothing happens; safety-catch on! Fumble hastily with the safety-catch, just as one of the group raises his gun again. Ah-ha; too *late*, old bird! The automatic answers loyally to repeated trigger-pulls; the group breaks up; two fly for their lives across the yard and hurdle the low mud wall separating the compound from the barbed wire and the open desert, I after them. Out on to the sharp shingle; an almighty toss and an ungainly sprawl, as one of those loose-fitting Jaegar slippers of the memsahib's providing comes off and trips me up. With breath clean knocked out of me, I make poor shooting with what remains of the clip in the automatic, and an empty pistol is all that I can point at two nimble figures skipping through the half-dismantled wire and out into the vague grey of the desert.

Bruised, dishevelled and in a towering rage, I limp back to the house. A dawning calmness brings the realisation that there were two get-aways, but three at the outset. Christmas!—there's another somewhere, and this automatic as much use as a sick headache. Must get another clip before investigating further. Dodge quickly back into the verandah and in through the open door, to find the memsahib sitting on the edge of the bed, a vision of daintiness in a silk nightie and her toes dangling, but rather white about the gills; and Hamish—

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shame on you, brother Scot—cowering under the bed !—a tiger in a rough-and-tumble, but incurably gun-shy.

" Hullo, why aren't you flat on the floor ? " is our somewhat ungracious welcome to the lady.

" Never thought of it. You all right ? "

" Rather. Where are those clips ? Lie down on the floor, quick. *Flat.* That's right ; and don't move. I've got to investigate a bit more."

I grab an electric torch and dart out. By now the servants in their quarters have awoken and are beginning to hammer, each on his locked door. Before starting operations the raiders have securely fastened the chains to the staples of the outside door-fastenings to prevent any interference. Let them be a moment. The fewer messing about just now, the better.

Round to the back.

M'm ; I *thought* so.

For there, in the middle of the moonlight patch, is a group composed of the big ' troopship case ' from the verandah, its hasp and staple wrenched off and half-open, and a grey-clad figure all muddled-up alongside, and motionless.

With automatic well to the fore, advance carefully ; no surprises, please. Closer. And now comes the subdued and whimpering cry of a man deadly hurt

" Hwee-ee-e . . . " ; hiccup

" Hwee-ee-e-ah . . . " ; hiccup.

" Hwee-ee . . . "

Take no chances. With the automatic to his ear-hole, flash the torch over him. Big burly ruffian. Don't know him. Where's he hurt ? The voice rises to an agonised " Ai-ee-EE ! " as I pull gently at his clothing, and desist. Poor devil. Got it somewhere amidships apparently. A sticky mess of blood oozes from under him.

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Time now to loose the servants. In strict order of personal courage they emerge. First, Jagat Bahadur, the Gurkha orderly, his kukri handy and raving at having been left out of the row. Then the syce, with a heavy stick; then the others, tailing on to the dog-boy. The cook not at all; but the wailings behind his door are those of a healthy man, not one who has caught a stray bullet.

Bring a *charpoy*, quick!

They come with a native bedstead. With infinite care we lift the poor blighter on to it, and set the servants to carry him off to the hospital, with a hasty note to Macdonald; Jagat Bahadur as escort, and as full of himself as if the *shikár* were his own.

Back to the bungalow; the memsahib, clean against orders, up and dressed, and Hamish with nose down, fussing about all over the place. A word or two; I tumble into my clothes, and the memsahib goes off to brew a pot of tea; or rather, to try to brew it, for in a minute back she comes again, white with rage and with unaccustomed swear-words in her dainty mouth. "The godown and kitchen are empty—empty, d'you hear? They've got the lot. Not a damn thing left!" And the intensity of her fury banks back the tears that should have been inevitable.

Dawn finds us piecing together in the early light the events of the night. Everything in the godown, the *bottle-khana*, and the kitchen, has vanished. They must have been at it for hours—within four yards of the sleeping dog and close to ourselves—passing each man-load out through the wire to the rest of the gang beyond, who went off with it as fast as it accumulated. But how they managed to handle piles of plates, crockery, glass, lamps, tinkly knives and silver, the whole rattlesome bag of tricks, without making more sound than a

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prowling mouse, was a revelation in burglary. What had roused the dog at the end must have been the crowning piece of impertinence; for the big 'troopship case' which stood in the verandah, about the same shape and size as an oaken hall-settee here at home and which contained nothing more important than golf-clubs and odds and ends, this they had lifted bodily, and had managed to scrape through the broken godown doors and so out into the back premises. They must have made their first and slightest noise in doing it. And all this on one of the brightest moonlight nights of the year. 'Pon my soul, they almost *deserved* their success!

Late that afternoon we recovered one tiny survival, close up to the boundary pillars, in the direction of Kadanai—a handful of fragments which, when afterwards riveted together, took the shape of a small china milk-jug (with small pink pimpernel and forget-me-not pattern round the edge—rather chaste), our only trophy of the night's doings. We have it still.

The Lady of Baldak stood on the verandah edge. She, at a range of seven miles, faced the Khánum of Kadanai; and, as anyone could plainly see, was wishing in every fibre of her little tiger heart that the distance had been only that number of inches.

VII.

So down to the hospital, and to Macdonald in the surgery.

"What news of Wallu?"

"He's still alive; it puzzles me how he manages it. He hasn't shown sign of consciousness, to my knowledge, since he came here; and yet he manages to live. I can't help thinking there's something keeping that old beggar

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alive—some wild urge which was in his tough old mind just as he was struck down, and which keeps on now as a sort of dumb delirium—simply pushing out the thought of giving in. I've heard of it happening in other cases. Wonder what it can be. . . . But that's a bad case you sent in to me this morning, sir. Who got him ? "

" H'm—a bad case, is it ? D'you mind if I go in and have a look at him ? "

I tiptoe down the long ward. There is Wallu, as stark and immovable as he has lain these three weeks past, hardly a change in the great gaunt features. On the bed next to him, watched over by the native assistant surgeon, lies our big Pathan of the night's business. I sidle in between the beds and bend over the unfortunate. One glance ; he's booked, right enough. Questioned, the doctor-babu tells us of a ghastly and hopeless wound : the heavy automatic bullet has drilled him clean through the pelvis from hip to hip, and, lying on his back with knees drawn up, he is gasping out the last hour of his life.

Fine chap, big powerful profile ; wonder who he can be ? We study him closely. . . .

Down, Hamish ! The dog is plucking at the slack of my khaki shorts from behind. Hullo ? Can't be the dog ; left him at home. Instantly an incredible thought flashes. I turn round with a jerk. *Wallu !* The long bony hand meets my bare knee. The great sunken eyes are open. Slowly, very slowly, an inch at a time, the bandaged head turns on the pillow, towards the next bed, in a keen and penetrating stare. " Sahib," in a whisper. I bend lower. " Sahib . . ." and, with a mighty effort, " sahib . . . *Tor Khan !* "

Slowly, slowly, by perceptible inches, the corners of the deeply sunken eyes wrinkle, and the great gaunt face

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breaks up into a smile of the most angelic beatitude; the eyes close, and, still smiling, he sinks into the long and healthy depths of life-giving sleep.

What? Oh, yes; *he's* all right. Not only still alive, but as strong as ever. Following my yearly practice, I sent him ten rupees last Christmas.

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X.

BABUJI BAHADUR!

MOTI LAL, babu, was small, fat and short-sighted. He was of Bengali extraction, and by appearance eminently fitted for the management of a 'Cheap-Jack' store in the Bow Bazaar in Calcutta. Instead, he was a clerk in the office of an Indian infantry battalion, and had attained the rank of havildar by virtue of an almost superhuman knowledge of the rules and regulations directing the routine of the adjutant's department.

When I assumed the adjutancy, Moti Lal had some ten years' service, and during the first few months of my office many were the pitfalls from which he turned aside my blundering footsteps. An urgent order would emanate from higher authority, referring airily to some obscure paragraph published in the dim past. After half an hour's profane searching among my files I would send out the S.O.S. for Moti Lal.

"I am coming, Huzoor!" in a throaty croak from the outer office, and a moment later he would bustle in, a very typical figure in his bulging brown coat and little round hat, with bright blue socks displaying themselves coyly below his long white dhoti, and disappearing into an enormous pair of unlaced black brogue shoes. He would stand beside my desk, nervously clasping and unclasping his fat hands and peering at me through his iron-rimmed spectacles.

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" Moti Lal, this refers to A.G.-1/5604 of August 1910, about walking-out dress for sepoys. Have we had it ? "

A short period of half-audible rumination would follow. " Yes, sir," in his pedantic Calcutta High School English. " No doubt saying that sepoys are not allowed walking in bazaar unless dressing in appropriate costume " ; and he would hurry away, to return presently with the desired letter, disinterred from some musty corner.

Many times during those first months did the fat hand of Moti Lal avert disaster from my inexperienced head, so that I grew to have a considerable regard for him. But among the sepoys his qualities were not so highly rated. The active fighting men from Rohtak and Gujerat looked on the mild little Bengali with the contempt of the wolf for the rabbit, and his peace-loving and timid disposition earned for him the ironical nickname of ' Babuji Bahadur.' In his office he was the acknowledged expert, but on the hockey field and in the lines he was a constant butt for the heavy witticisms of the barrack-room.

One day during a company hockey match I was standing on the touchline. Behind me was a group of Punjabi Mussulman N.C.O.'s, while Moti Lal and one of his brother clerks were seated on the ground a short distance away. The half-time whistle blew, and the perspiring players adopted various attitudes of repose, leaving the onlookers with nothing to absorb their attention. From the group behind me commenced a loud conversation, suggestive of a duologue between two stage comedians—

" Nawaz Khan, hast thou heard the news ? "

" What news, brother ? "

" There is reputed to be an order that all babus must appear at office in uniform "—a sly allusion to Moti Lal's unmartial costume.

A noise denoting astonishment, and then—

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" Doubtless Babuji Bahadur will be allowed an orderly to tie his puggaree and his puttees."

Roars of guttural laughter followed this sally. I glanced at Moti Lal. Seated motionless on the ground, he was peering into space through his glasses in a brave pretence not to have heard the remark, but there was a suspicious moisture in his eyes, for the native of India is painfully sensitive to ridicule.

The comedy duologue continued—

" Nawaz Khan."

" Ay, brother ? "

" They say that in future all babus are to march with their companies every morning."

" Oho ; doubtless a gharri will be allotted to Babuji Bahadur lest he should weary by the way."

This reference to Moti Lal's sedentary habits provoked as much mirth as the previous effort.

The Bengali's companion, fearing an unenviable notoriety by his association with the object of these remarks, rose and sauntered away. The little babu remained, a lonely and pathetic figure. I decided to take up the cudgels on his behalf.

" Nawaz Khan," said I, " if your brain was one-half as active as your tongue you would have done greater things in the promotion examination yesterday."

The big Punjabi naik grinned sheepishly, and his companions roared heartily at his discomfiture. Moti Lal gave no sign that he had heard, but a few minutes later I discovered that he had shifted his position to within a few feet of me. In this situation he remained until the end of the game, and the baiting was not renewed.

When we were ordered to Waziristan, the exigencies of the service obliged us to take Moti Lal with us as head clerk. He disliked the adventure exceedingly, and under-

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went much hardship on the march by reason of his tender and unpractised physique. While we were *en route* he was naturally forced to don the uniform of his rank, and a comical figure he presented, with his puggaree perched precariously on his head, and his rifle, a weapon which he had never fired and which he regarded with deep distrust, clutched gingerly in his fat fingers. His heavy marching boots caused him excruciating agony, and he loathed the pack on his back with the loathing of Sinbad for the Old Man of the Sea.

But he was still with us when we arrived at Nana Khel, the perimeter camp that was to be our home for the next eight months, and once he was installed in the battalion office tent with his files and his typewriter, and was allowed to revert to his dhoti and his little round hat, life became less of a nightmare for him.

The sepoys used to curdle his blood with grisly tales of the savage Pathans, in whose territory we were instilling law and order, and he had a hearty respect, mingled with considerable dislike, for the fierce-featured tribesmen who used to enter the camp with eggs and sheep, regarding each as a potential thief and murderer, which, after all, was the correct attitude.

One day a severe sandstorm swept over the camp, and the telephone-wire to the office was snapped by a gust of wind. I was at lunch in the mess when this occurred, and Moti Lal arrived, hot and flustered, to report.

Annoyed at the interruption to my meal, I hurried down to the office, and found an ordinary break in the wire just outside the tent.

"Moti Lal," said I, "in order that I may not be disturbed again while at my food in order to repair a broken telephone-wire, you shall now learn how to do this thing yourself."

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" Sir," said Moti Lal, clasping and unclasping his hands, " I am educated man, but, being ignorant of electrics, I was compelled to disturb your honour. But now I shall learn," and he studied the work in hand earnestly and with great concentration, putting many questions.

Shortly after the damage had been made good, the Staff Captain of the Brigade rang up with the information that a gentleman named Yusuf Khan, a tribal raider of some repute, was abroad with his gang, consisting of thirty cut-throats of the same calibre as himself, and had been seen by Government agents in our vicinity, so that it was advisable to take the usual precautionary measures.

We were at that time responsible for the protection of some three miles of the convoy road along the bed of the Takki Zam River, and our duties included the holding of various permanent pickets on this line. These were small stone redoubts, placed at tactical points on the heights on either side of the road, and garrisoned by parties varying from fifteen to twenty rifles. Each one of these pickets was connected to camp by telephone, and, on news being received of raiding gangs and similar gentry, warnings were issued to all pickets to be on the alert.

Nothing occurred for two days, and on the morning of the third I felt in need of exercise, and decided to obtain an escort and make a visit to some of our permanent pickets.

I entered the office. Business was slack, and I espied Moti Lal, with nothing to do, presiding over his desk like a fat brown idol.

" Moti Lal," said I, " have you ever been out of camp ? " The little babu blinked apprehensively at me.

" No, sir," he admitted.

" Then," I answered, " you will come with me to Snag

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Picket. You require exercise, for you are becoming painfully fat. Soon, verily, instead of Moti Lal, men will name you 'Mota' (fat) Lal!"

The Bengali rose reluctantly to his feet.

"Does your Honour wish my wearing uniform?" he asked wistfully.

"No; come as you are," I said. "You will find it sufficiently difficult to climb these hills in a dhoti, and in puttees you would never be able to climb at all!"

The N.C.O. of the escort entered and reported, and we set out—six lean Punjabi riflemen, Moti Lal and myself.

Snag Picket, our destination, was set at the summit of a steep and arduous ascent, and earned its name from the Snag, a black threatening bluff of rock, which overlooked it from a distance of some seven hundred yards. The picket was badly sited, and we, to whom fell the task of holding it, were firmly of the opinion that sooner or later trouble would eventuate from this quarter, in which case the garrison of the picket would have a very uncomfortable time. However, the position had been occupied for about six months with no untoward incident, and it was considered by higher authority that any enemy on the Snag could be dislodged by the mountain howitzer battery in camp.

After an hour's strenuous climb, the pace of which was modified to suit Moti Lal, we arrived at the picket. The little Bengali was perspiring at every pore, and had been forced to make at least ten halts to recover breath and to wipe his spectacles.

"Oh, sir," he gasped as the picket came in sight, "this is no land for peaceable man, neither am I wondering that the folk who inhabit it are all shaitans and badmashes," and he seated himself on a rock and puffed.

Our arrival caused a sensation. The N.C.O. of the

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escort, who had derived much quiet amusement from the babu's unfortunate condition, announced the startling news.

"Behold," cried he, "we have brought Babuji Bahadur to inspect you!"

"Shabash," grunted the havildar commanding the picket. "After this doubtless Babuji Bahadur will command a picket himself, and I shall be able to go on leave to my home."

Badinage was plentiful, but poor Moti Lal was too exhausted to reply. He entered the picket, and sat heavily on the firing-step. "Kaisa kharab mulk!" ("What an awful country!") he wailed, applying his handkerchief once more.

I made a tour of the premises, examined the wire, and returned inside the picket to test the firing positions, leaving two of the escort outside with the picket signaller, who had established a heliograph on the bare space of ground beneath the walls, and was squatting beside it, ready to receive visual messages from camp and from neighbouring pickets.

I gazed through my binoculars at the wild and rugged panorama spread out below us, the slender line of the Takki Zam winding its way into the heart of the barren hills, and on its farther bank Nana Khel Camp, looking like a pygmy settlement, each tiny unit—man, horse, or tent—standing out clearly in the scorching sun. I could make out my own quarters, with my blankets spread over the tent-ropes to air, and Morris, my 'stable companion,' lounging against the door with a pipe in his mouth.

Then it happened . . .

A series of sharp vicious cracks, a few puffs of dust and the hum of splintered rock, and a cry—"Ah-h, Allah, goli laga!" ("Ah-h, Allah, I am hit!") and one

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of the sepoys I had left outside the picket staggered through the door with his hand to his side, and sank down on the floor.

"Sahib," he gasped, "the Mahsud-log fired from the Great Rock, and Sepoy Feroz Khan and Signaller Imam Ali are dead," and he fainted.

The men were already at their alarm-posts, with the burly havildar directing operations. Bolts clicked home, and bombs were placed ready to hand. Another volley from the Snag swept over the picket, and smacked and thudded against the walls.

One glance over the parapet satisfied me that the words of the wounded sepoy were true. The signaller lay on his back with a hole in his forehead, and Feroz Khan sprawled grotesquely, face downwards. His puggaree had rolled away, and a crimson stain behind the ear showed where the bullet had struck him.

I searched the bare face of the Snag with my glasses. Not a living thing was visible, but even as I looked the enemy gave further evidence of his presence by a third fusillade.

The garrison replied with three rounds of rapid fire at the crest of the bluff, but the answering volley sent two men reeling from the parapet, and showed us the futility of attempting to cope with our hidden foes by rifle-fire from our disadvantageous position.

Seeing that the only way to dislodge our assailants was to direct the fire of the mountain guns on them from camp, I cursed the man who had sited the execrable picket and grabbed the receiver.

A faint voice answered my peremptory call, but before I could transmit a message the enemy fired again and the telephone went dead. A shout from one of the sentries announced that the wire had been cut by a bullet about

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thirty yards from the picket. I swore with fervour, and put down the useless receiver. As I rose to my feet my glance fell on Moti Lal. He was crouching in silence on the firing-step and looking inquiringly at me through his glasses.

"Come on, Moti Lal," I snapped; "get hold of a rifle and try to be of some use. We want the help of every man here. The telephone-line is cut, and I cannot tell the guns where to fire. For the love of Mike, jump to it!"

The little clerk wrung his hands. "Huzoor," he spoke rapidly in the vernacular, "alas! I know not how to handle a rifle, nor do I know the way to bind a wounded man. Ae! this is an evil land, and I am the most useless creature in it!"

The havildar, his attention attracted by this painful exhibition, spat contemptuously on the ground.

"Son of a monkey!" he growled, "thou art more fit to nurse the offspring of a sweeper than to be here among men," and he jammed the bolt of his rifle viciously home on another cartridge.

I turned away from the distressed Bengali and made a fresh survey of our enemy's position.

"Sahib," said the havildar, "we see no man, but every time we raise our heads to fire the bullets come. What shall we do?"

"See, Khuda Dad," said I; "let each man keep his post and make no movement, being ready to fire instantly should anything be seen to move on the Great Rock. Soon the mobile column will be coming to our help. How many men are hit?"

Before the havildar could reply, the rifles on the Snag cracked again, and one of the watching sentries dropped his rifle and sank, coughing, to his knees.

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"That is the sixth, Huzoor," said Khuda Dad grimly. "Truly, they can shoot, these sons of Eblis!"

"If the wire were not broken we should destroy them in a very few minutes," I said, and crossed to the wounded sentry.

Suddenly a startled exclamation burst from the havildar, and then his deep voice boomed out—

"At the Great Rock, three rounds, rapid fire! Allah, Allah! Babuji Bahadur has gone mad!"

While the entire garrison blazed at the Snag, working their rifles with the best speed they might, I leapt to the door of the picket and stared out at an amazing sight.

His white dhoti flying out all around him, his little hat on the back of his head, and his fat legs going like pistons, Moti Lal was scurrying across the open ground outside the picket in the direction of camp. I shouted at him, but he took not the least notice. I decided that his nerves must have given way completely under the strain of the past few minutes, and that he was blindly obeying the impulse of the thoroughly terrified animal, to run, anywhere, in any direction, out of reach of those spitting rifles.

But suddenly he flung himself on the ground and seemed to be groping with his hands. The havildar gave a great shout—

"Shabash, Babuji Bahadur! See, Huzoor, he mends the wire! Oh, brothers, fire, rapid fire at the Pathan dogs! Keep their heads down; keep their heads down! Allah, Allah, Shabash!"

It was true. Moti Lal was indeed mending the wire. A great lump rose in my throat as I watched him. His fat hands, shaking pitiably, brought the severed ends of the wire together. With trembling fingers held close to his short-sighted eyes, he was striving desperately to put

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into practice what I had taught him two days before. His glasses had fallen off when he hurled his stout little body on the ground, and his blindness was proving a severe obstacle to the accomplishment of the delicate task. The rifles of the Snag barked spitefully, and chips of rock and puffs of dust kicked up around him.

With a prayer in my heart I clasped the receiver to my ear and pressed the buzzing key with an impatient finger. After a seeming eternity there was an answering buzz. We were through!

"Hullo, BBQ! BBQ!" I sent the battery's code call along the line. "Snag Picket speaking!"

"Hullo!" A voice, faint, but distinct—"Battery speaking!"

I rasped out the long-deferred message. There was a pause. Then two puffs of white smoke rose from the edge of the far-away camp. The shells whined over the picket, and burst with a roar on the face of the Snag, thirty feet below the crest. Good shooting, but the enemy was untouched.

I spoke again into the telephone. Another pause; then the white puffs, the whine of the shells, and two clouds of dust appeared exactly on the crest of the menacing bluff. An approving "Ahaa! Khub durust!"[1] broke from the watching sepoys.

"O.K.," I shouted into the receiver.

Then the battery let itself go, and for five minutes the crest of the Snag was pounded, smashed and splintered as the accurate little mountain howitzers spat their shells out as fast as the sweating gunners could load.

No Pathan bullets were coming over now, and presently one of the sepoys gave a cry. "See, Huzoor, they run!"

[1] "Excellent!"

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Following his outstretched finger I saw several figures slinking down the hill. The havildar rapped out a fire order, and every rifle spoke swiftly. Two of the flying figures fell and lay still. Khuda Dad snorted with pleasure.

"It is well, sahib, the range is long and the Mahsud-log are running. The shooting is good," as the last of the tribesmen disappeared from sight and the firing ceased.

It was only then that we thought again of Moti Lal. I looked out of the picket door. He was lying quite still by the telephone-wire, and with a sickening fear at my heart I told off four men to go to him. The telephone buzzed frantically, and I clapped it to my ear.

"Hullo, Snag!" It was Morris speaking. "You all right, old chap? Good! Any casualties?"

The four sepoys edged their way through the door of the picket, bearing in their midst the still form of the little babu. One of them answered my unspoken query with a broad grin. "All is well, Huzoor; it is but a splinter of rock that has struck him on the head, and the sahib knows that a babu's head is very thick."

"Seven stretcher cases," I gulped into the receiver.

. . . . . .

The General's voice rang over the parade—

"Number 2674. Havildar Moti Lal. Indian Order of Merit. For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty under fire at Snag Picket on 7th July . . ."

Moti Lal, his puggaree and puttees tied specially for the occasion, but presenting withal a singularly uncouth appearance, waddled rapidly forward, and gave an imitation of a military salute, which, on account of his extreme

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nervousness, hardly did justice to the hours of careful coaching I had spent on him prior to this great event.

The General, who knew his story, pinned the decoration to the little babu's breast, and held out his hand with an encouraging smile.

"The name thy comrades give thee is well deserved," he said, "Shabash, Babuji Bahadur!"

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XI.

OLD FOR-EVER.

I.

THE Olivers were an outstanding couple, even in that outstanding body of men and women who form the thin but efficient bulwark against the lean wolf-men roaming the hills in packs from the Malakand to Dera Ghazi Khan, and looking down with covetous eyes from their barren fastnesses on the plains, shining with water, rich in beeves, yellow with corn and teeming with loot and women. Over those sleek river-laced lands successive waves of wolf-men have surged out of the ravenous North, century after century, from the passes which gave the Sikhs the cholera in the days of Ranjeet Singh, harrying, ravishing and leaving their scars to the walls of that Delhi which is a far cry, as all Hind from Cape Comorin to Lundi Kotal can tell you.

When for the first time in history a counter-wave swept northwards from the capital of the Moguls over the prostrate Punjab to the foot of the astounded hills, that wave was crested by white men, who established themselves forthwith like a wire fence, barbed too, between the tribesmen and their prey. *Our side the fence law, order and security*, said the audacious Feringhis; *your side, go as you please.* And the white race succeeded under conditions which had baffled the Lion of the Punjab

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himself, and amid men who had scoffed at the Sikh Raj. Of the many great Frontiersmen of that first wave, in the days between the overthrow of the Khalsa Army and the Mutiny, the greatest alike in stature and personality was the black-bearded giant, John Nicholson.

As a merry stripling Tom Oliver had ridden the Frontier from Bannu to Peshawar with the famous Deputy Commissioner in the days when the feeling between the officers of John Company and Queen's Service men ran to duelling point. He had accompanied his chief on his ride from Kohat through the murky pass to Peshawar at the time the mysterious lotus-flower was being passed in secrecy and silence from native regiment to native regiment, and had acted as Nicholson's A.D.C. when he succeeded Neville Chamberlain in the command of the Moveable Column that marched on Delhi after saving the Punjab.

Young Oliver had been beside his chief in the narrow lane by the Kabul Gate, when, after the death of the gallant Jacob, the 1st Bengal Fusiliers wavered under a terrific fire from the roof-tops, and Nicholson sprang forward to rally them to a fresh assault on the Burn bastion. At the moment his leader fell mortally wounded, young Oliver fell too at his side.

"Where's Lad?" was the constant question of the great soldier during his nine days' death agony on the Ridge. And "Where's Lad?" were among the last words he muttered, blue-lipped and faintly frothing, when at last death brought relief to one of the noblest of Englishmen.

To his chief Tom Oliver had always been Lad; and to the Frontier, Lad he remained long after the last gleam of boyishness had vanished and he had become the sombre soldier of Frontier legend, a man of a temper apt to keep the border marches and cope with the iron inhabitants

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of those iron hills. It was not till twenty years after the death of his first leader that his nickname changed.

The dun mountains that lie across the gate of the North like some old lion, showing his bones as he dies of starvation, but majestic and terrible still, are for all their air of deadness always aflicker and not seldom ablaze. Those blazes are sudden as explosions. A hush, a long-time smouldering, perhaps a faint eddy of smoke upon a ridge, then a sudden spurt of flame stabs the darkness like a dagger, and four hundred miles of Frontier is alight. Forthwith ensues a molten eruption. Down a hundred gaunt hillsides turbulent lashkars of shaven-headed swordsmen come tumbling like lava under huge green banners and inspired by Allah-intoxicated mullahs.

The origin of these eruptions is nearly always the same, as any political who has been agent in one of the passes and knows his job will tell you. The mullahs get at the women in the name of God, as the mullahs of most lands are wont to do. Thereafter the women approach their men daintily and with mocking smiles.

"You are not men," they say. "You are children. We will play with you no more till you have proved yourselves. Come back to us after a goodly slaughter of the infidels, and you will see what you will see. That is the will of Allah, which cannot be gainsaid."

The thwarted tribesmen then rush to impale themselves upon British bayonets, inspired by the hope of a houris-peopled Paradise if they die, and of dutiful and docile wives if they live to return to the home-tower in their native valleys.

In the late 'seventies, when trouble was brewing all along the Afghan border, one such eruption thus fomented found Lad Oliver, now a Major in Pank's Punjabis, cut off at the wrong end, which is to say the Afghan end,

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of a sixty-mile pass. A runner slipped through with the news, and the roar of volley-firing booming down the long defile told its own tale to the detachment at the right, which is to say the British, end of the pass. Those were the days when the heliograph had just come into use in the British Army. The officer in charge at the base signalled back to Kohat, the headquarters of the Punjab Frontier Force, that a company of his regiment had been isolated at Ali Kheyl and was being swamped by Afghan regulars aided by tribesmen under the Commander-in-Chief in Khost, that merry fellow Faiz Mahomed Khan.

"Which company?" came the query from H.Q. "And who commands them?"

"The Jat company; Major Oliver."

"Get in touch with him by helio."

"We have tried and failed. No sun his end of the pass apparently."

Later in the day, however, communication between the two posts was established for a moment between clouds.

"How long can you hold on?" asked the man at the base.

Back flashed the laconic reply—

"For ever."

II.

Thenceforward to the men of Chillianwallah and Sobraon and the Ridge, Tom Oliver might still be Young Lad; to the rising generation he was Old For-ever.

The new name stuck, for it expressed the man. There was about it a hint of Cromwell and his Ironsides chaunting as the mists rose before the crowning mercy of Dunbar, "The Lord of Hosts my shepherd is," which rightly suggested the core of Puritan steel that was the funda-

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mental characteristic of a soldier, simply religious after the manner of the older Mutiny men—Herbert Edwardes, Havelock, the Lawrences.

Those who did not know Old For-ever well attributed this hardness in him to incorrect causes. They said he was an Ishmael, and had gone the ordinary way of the disappointed man. It was not so. True, promotion had come but slowly to him for all his service; but he was not ambitious, and therefore had not reaped the first-fruits of ambition—bitterness. His silent and somewhat lonely habit of life were due rather to a temperament austere and almost monkish. Moreover, Old For-ever's few intimates were aware that he had refused times without number both Staff appointments and positions as a political, pressed upon him too, which would have put within his grasp the Chief Commissionership of the Frontier Provinces. He preferred, however, to command the Jat company of Pank's Punjabis.

"I am a soldier," he always said. "And a regimental soldier."

In his own regiment it was maintained that no man knew Old For-ever who had not seen him in action with his Jats. Then the stern and solitary soldier of the Piffer Mess, who was never addressed in the way of chaff by his juniors, and rarely by his equals, unbent. He became genial first, and later radiant. By the time his penny whistle emerged from his pocket he was a boy jesting with his peers, a father merry amid his children.

"The Happy Warrior," young Apple Pippin, his sub-altern, called him after the affair of Ali Kheyl.

At this time his face seen in profile, and inscribed by Cherry Wright for all to see amid less desirable works of art on the walls of the fort at Jumrood, was rocky as the Shutargardan: the nose with its bony promontory very

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pronounced, the long chin curling upwards, the hair just beginning to retreat from a forehead that sloped a thought too much. He never tanned; colourless always as his hero John Nicholson. His eyes were blue, but not the fierce and vivid Saxon blue of that other great frontiersman, Hodson of Hodson's Horse; rather a clouded lavender that in certain moods took on the hue of smoked steel. Women remarked, not without surprise, that the note of them was not hardness but wistfulness. His dark hair, too, did not turn white as did that of other men, beginning at the temples and spreading outwards; but there descended upon it a fine mist of grey, in some lights almost invisible, in others like dew upon a lawn.

"There is music in that man and mysticism," said a great lady who saw him at Murree, and was fascinated by his face and piqued by his avoidance of her.

"There *is* music of a simple kind," her host admitted grimly. "But we don't speak of it as music in the Force. We call it pip-squeak—Oliver's pip-squeak."

Old For-ever's penny whistle had, indeed, long been a standing joke in the Piffers. It was not a penny whistle really, much less was it a flute. It was a crude instrument, something between the two, that Oliver had picked up in a remote Waziri village near the Tochi, on one of those mysterious expeditions of his when he disappeared for weeks at a time into the hills with a Pathan orderly and a shot-gun. Once possessed of his toy he was never parted from it, and spent his happiest hours piping to himself, with gaps and gasps, familiar little tunes. In moments of stress it emerged, as it were, spontaneously from his pocket. During the affair of the fort, for instance, at the critical moment the thin strains of "Pop goes the weasel" brought renewed strength to the hearts of his fainting Jats.

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"Then the Major Sahib took out his pipe and made prayer to his God to come and help the brethren—even so!" the Jemadar of the Jat company told Maharaj Singh, describing the fight.

The Subadar-Major nodded his magnificent head.

"It is always so with the Major Sahib when the battle waxes," he said. "The Major Sahib calls upon his pipe —even so!—to the God of the Sahib-log. And the God comes without fail." Priding himself upon his religious knowledge, the old Sikh added for the further enlightenment of his junior, "This God is one Lat Yusuf, but I have not heard that he is brother to the Burra Lat at Calcutta—Lat Crike Yusuf, who wrought miracles near Mecca in my father's time Our gurus at Amritsar have told me of him."

"He is a fine God to fight," remarked the Jemadar, not without awe. "Did I not behold him at Ali Kheyl? I speak, Subadar-Major Sahib, as a small and foolish child."

"Yea, verily, Jemadar Sahib. He deals strong blows in the battle when the Major Sahib calls upon him," the Subadar-Major admitted and departed, nodding majestically.

When he was a little over forty, Tom Oliver married a woman like unto himself, who seemed to have absorbed the quality of the hills amid which she lived. People were surprised; but the most critical admitted that if Old For-ever must marry at all, the only possible mate for him was the one he had chosen. The pair were curiously alike physically. Marion was tall, athletic, taciturn, and at a pinch had taken her husband's place upon parade at the head of his Jats without detection, so the story went. She looked her formidable best on horseback. From under the battered solar topee which she wore with

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a chin-strap, eyes that were the hue of smoked steel in certain moods and certain lights looked out and held you with the steady grip of a man's. You saw a firm long mouth, the lips slightly compressed, a strong chin and a long bony face that was healthy for all its pallor. Her voice, too, like her husband's penny whistle, popping out always in unexpected places, surprised you, so deep and rich it was as it issued voluminously from her lean chest.

There was music in it too, of a rare quality, echoing.

People called her plain; no man certainly, and few women, ever spoke of her as ugly. "Une belle laide, perhaps," said the kind old Colonel of the regiment. When she married she was fifteen years her husband's junior, though few would have suspected it. Marion Granet was not a girl—and never had been; she was not a woman—and never would be; that was the general opinion. Throughout the Frontier Force she was known always as the Highlander, nobody quite knew why, seeing that she was English to the bone, of a good Yorkshire family. But the name was accepted, as such names are, because it fitted.

"Her father was a Granet, her mother a Block of Concrete," said the flippant jokers of the Force. The couple, indeed, had the reputation of being somewhat inhuman in their attitude towards each other and towards the world. But nothing really was known of them in the Piffers, and not a great deal even in the regiment. They entertained little, living very quietly in a pleasant bungalow amid the apricot orchards of Kohat, with a little stream running at the foot of the garden. It was known to all, however, that they lived for the regiment, and especially for the Jat company.

If ever there had been a doubt as to whether she was

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the right wife for Old For-ever, Marion settled it when, as a bride, she killed her man, and that man, too, the Mullah Perwindah of Parachinar and evil notoriety. That happened after the reprisals on Thal at the mouth of the Kuram, which Old For-ever was told off to carry out with his Jats. The mullah sent down five picked ghazis from Hazir Pir with orders to bag "the Kaffir who trots like a camel," dead or alive. But the Pathan company of Pank's Punjabis were up to the wiles of their cousins the Turis, and bagged the ghazis instead. That delighted the Pathan company, who for long thereafter threw it up in the teeth of the Jats, to whom it was recognised the Major Sahib belonged.

"These murderers were thy people," said the teased and surly Jats. "How should we know the way to deal with them? In *our* country we know nothing of such fellows"

The Pathans grinned and polished their teeth as they squatted on their hunkers.

"Well for the izzat of thy company that we were there to protect thine officer. Else had it gone ill with him, O cows of the fat Punjab, who chew the cud and draw the plough and greatly sleep, and have neither eyes to see nor ears to hear nor nostrils to smell when Death like a striped tiger stalks thy sahib."

"In *our* country we have no murderers," muttered the peasant soldiers of the plains doggedly. "We know not their ways. For we are not jackals who live in caves and sharpen their teeth on rocks on the bare hillside where no corn can grow because God's curse is on it."

The simple fellows were anxious about their Sahib, and not without cause. For it was known all along the Frontier from Dera Ismail Khan to Fort Mackeson that after his first failure the Mullah Perwindah, a stubborn old man

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and no coward, had sworn a great oath that his home and his tower should see him no more till he or the Kaffir who trotted like a camel had quitted the world ; and had forthwith come down the pass from Parachinar to see what he could do himself for God and His Prophet. What he did, in fact, was to lie up in the culvert under the road that led from Old For-ever's bungalow to the lines ; and there lay up with him a tulwar with a blade like a hawk's beak and his trusted jhezail.

That was how he caught little Apple Pippin and Cherry Wright coming away from the Olivers' bungalow that Sunday evening, full of chaff, both lads unarmed, though well they knew the old Frontier saying, " Once beyond the Indus always carry a revolver after dusk." The Highlander heard the first shot, and guessed at once who it was meant for, for she knew full well the story of the mullah's oath. Also she heard just then, to her intense relief, her Tom pip-squeaking on his pipe, " Onward, Christian so-o-old-dears," as was his custom on Sunday evening, and was glad. She snatched his Martini-Henry from the hat-stand, and stalked with long strides down to the road, loading and clicking the breech-block home as she went.

When she reached the road the mullah had already finished little Apple Pippin, who lay face down across the way in the new grey dittoes of which he was so delightfully self-conscious, and was finishing the other lad with his tulwar. Marion was a good, but by no means great, rifle-shot ; and in the scrimmage that was going on between the English lad armed with his bare fists and the steel-shod fanatic, few but her husband would have risked a shot. She ran with long strides down the road towards the tumult. The mullah heard the soft pad of her approach, and cut his victim down with the scream of some giant

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bird of prey. Then he turned to meet the new danger. What he saw staggered him. A woman was coming at him! He hesitated—and was lost.

Marion was standing in the middle of the road, loading again, with wary eyes on the three men strewn in the dust fifty yards in front, when her husband came leaping towards her with a naked sword in his hand, and naked swords in his eyes, and his terriers tearing at his heels.

"Don't go up to him, Tom," she called, never turning. "I'm not sure he's dead."

Old For-ever had considerably more experience in such matters than his bride.

He glanced at her face. She was steady as an iceberg heaving faintly in the long Atlantic swell, and much the colour of one. He touched her hand as he shot past.

"He's not dead, my dear," he said. "But he's done. You blotted him plumb through the chest."

He bent over the three men sprawling alongside each other in the road: the fair English lads in their neat Sunday suits from Jermyn Street splashed and shining with blood, and the old swordsman in his dingy white robes gasping out his life and clutching at his chest.

"He's scuppered the two boys," said Old For-ever, very white and quiet to his wife who had followed him. "There's not the ghost of a flicker in either of them." His anger was awful, so still it was and white. It made Marion tremble. She thought the wrath of God must be like that.

Then up galloped Jigger Jackson, the doctor of the 10th Marathas, a little spluttering black-moustached Eurasian, who flung himself off his pony.

"Pork-butcher of Cawnpur!" he shouted in his broken Pushtu in the ear of the passing mullah. "Hearken! Thy body shall be sewn in the hide of a well-fatted sow

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and shall be preserved thus in spirits of alcohol in the museum at Peshawar, that any unbeliever from the bazaar may behold thy shame and make mock of thee for ever."

"The man's dying," said Marion briefly.

"I don't care if he is!" retorted Jigger valiantly.

"You ought to," snapped Old For-ever. "Shut up. We're English—some of us."

The dying ghazi's eyes wandered from face to face. Whether he understood what was passing or only guessed the import it is hard to say. He raised his hand to his forehead in some kind of surly acknowledgment.

"O Kaffir who trots like a camel, thou art a Sahib even as is said among my people," he muttered. "But *thou*, Black Face and Bainshut, art the son of a pariah bitch by a jackal that died of the foaming madness! *Thou* canst not harm me." He closed his eyes. "My place in Paradise is sure as is thine own in Jehannum. I have slain two infidels, and would that I had slain a third! I have done well."

That unloosed the tongue of Old For-ever. He bent over the dying fanatic.

"Well hast thou done indeed!" he cried. "It is like a true Turi and swordsman of the Prophet to slay two children and attempt the slaughter of a woman and then make boast of it! Hearken, O mullah! For twenty years have I known the men of the tribes from the Suleiman Hills to Abbotabad, and have dwelt among them—Waziris, Ghilzais, Jowaki Afridis, Hazaras, Swatis, Mohmunds. They have feasted at my house, and I in their towers. We have been brothers of blood one day and enemies to the death the next. I have loved them and I have fought them. But always, whether friend or foe, I have respected them because they were men and war-

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riors. And never till now have I known even a treacherous Mahsud set out to the slaughter of women and children ! "

The dying ghazi wiped the froth from his lips.

" As to the lads thou liest, according as is the custom of thy race," he answered calmly. " These were not babes. They were man-grown, officer-sahibs in the service of the Woman across the Black Water. Were they not with thee at Thal that day ? Did I not see them with mine own eyes at the burning of the homes of my people, and making sport like young bulls at the ravishing of our women ? "

" Son of the Mother of Lies," said Old For-ever sternly, " thou wast not in Thal that day. Well I knew where thou wast. Thou wast in thy tower hiding behind the skirts of thy women, lest the rod of chastisement fall on thy back too."

The trans-frontier man paid no heed He hitched himself upon his elbow and peered with glazing eyes at Marion.

" In the matter of the memsahib," he said, " I swear to thee by the Kaaba that when my eye fell upon her as she came down the road, running even as thou runnest, O accursed, with long strides like a trotting camel, I thought it was thyself disguised as a woman to escape the wrath of God and His servant."

He fell back in the road, salaaming feebly to the white woman standing like a pillar at his feet.

Old For-ever bent over him.

" I believe thee, O mullah," he said in the ear of the dying fanatic.

III.

The affair of the Mullah Perwindah was the beginning of a more serious and a bloodier business. The troubles with Sher Ali, the Amir of Afghanistan, long brewing,

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boiled over. General Roberts went up the Kuram through Thal with a column to deal with it, and Pank's Punjabis went with him.

On the night march to surprise the Spingawi Kotal at the head of the pass, where speed and secrecy were the essence of the operation, things did not go well. The pace was too slow, and there was straggling. Bobs rode up himself to the head of the column to find out what was amiss. The place of honour was held by a Punjabi regiment, accorded that distinction by reason of its record, which equalled and, so it maintained, even surpassed that of Pank's. The Pathan companies were leading, and the Pathans were neighbours of and akin to the tribesmen about to be attacked. Bobs scented danger and summoned the Colonel, in whose ear as he went to the call a Sikh orderly whispered that there was treachery amid the Pathans. Just then a sepoy let off his rifle. The Jemadar did not fall the culprit out. Instantly Bobs halted the column and sent the 72nd Highlanders and Pank's Punjabis to take the lead.

The column got on the move again and swung briskly on its way. Towards dawn, as they neared their destination, Bobs turned to his A.D.C.

"Go and see what's leading now," he said.

"Pank's Punjabis, sir," the answer came back.

"The Pathan company?"

"No, sir; Major Oliver and his Jats."

"Good," said the little man on the big waler. He drew up at the side of the road, struck a match and looked at his watch. "We shall do it," he said. "Go and tell Oliver directly he reaches the foot of the Kotal to front-form company and charge without waiting further orders."

Old For-ever did, and took the position.

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At the storming of the Peiwar Kotal, and indeed throughout the campaign, Pank's Punjabis again did well.

A year after, when Bobs led them into Afghanistan with the Kabul Field Force to avenge the murder of Cavagnari, the British Envoy, and the massacre of the British Mission, they did better. Old For-ever was now second-in-command.

In October the force occupied the Amir's capital. In the majestic Bala Hissar, arsenal and citadel, the scene of the last stand of Hamilton and his Guides, pockmarked still with the bullets of that great fight and splashed with blood, the British General, in the presence of the chief Sirdars, addressed the assembled multitude from the steps of the Hall of Audience and proclaimed its punishment to the guilty city.

A few days later the force moved out into Sherpur, outside the native city, the new cantonments prepared by the late Amir for his army.

Early in the winter telegraphic communication was fitfully established with India; but heliographs with Lundi Kotal at the head of the Khyber and the Afghan capital supplied a surer avenue of news. They winked all day. Old For-ever, whenever he had a moment to spare, might be found standing on the flat roof of his quarters with folded arms, his face to the east and back to Kabul, watching those flashes. He was waiting news and anxious: everybody in the Force knew why. Then one afternoon one of Bobs' Gurkha orderlies came into the lines of the Punjabis. Forthwith the Colonel himself went over to the quarters of his second-in-command.

"Bobs wants to see you, Lad," he said kindly.

"Now, sir?"

"I believe so."

Old For-ever went with set face. He had not liked the

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look in the Colonel's eyes. There was compassion in them.

"What's the trouble?" he said to the little Gurkha trotting at his side. "Mahomed Jan on the move?"

"I know not, Sahib. I think the mem-sahib."

When Old For-ever entered the General's room the other officers present disappeared. The little man in the Balaclava whiskers and the big riding-boots rose gravely to greet the friend of twenty years.

"Well, Lad, old lad," he said affectionately.

"What is it, sir?" asked Old For-ever almost abruptly.

There was a moment's pause.

"How was your wife when last you heard?"

"Well, sir—considering."

Bobs looked out of the window.

"I haven't very good news, Lad," he said quietly. "Among the reports that came through this afternoon, quite unofficially, was this." He handed the other a slip of paper on which he had written in his own hand the following message: *Reported from Kohat that Mrs Oliver has died in childbed.*

Old For-ever glanced at it. "Do you know who the sender is?" he asked.

"Yes; Bartlett of the Khyber column."

"Bart's reliable," said Old For-ever gloomily.

"Usually," Bobs answered. "And I had the message repeated. But he reports it as a rumour only. It may not be confirmed."

The other shook his head.

"It's true," he said. "I've killed my darling." And he went out.

And that was the first sure intimation anybody had that there was something on earth Old For-ever loved better than his regiment and his Jats.

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IV.

After that Old For-ever went out into the darkness alone. And when he did that it was terrible, as the older men in the Force well knew. In the course of his service he had done it three times : once on the Ridge when they told him, sorely stricken himself, that he would never see John Nicholson again ; once when a Pathan native officer, in whom he had trusted implicitly, sold him for a song in the Jowaki country ; and once (unknown this to all but one) when Marion Granet first refused him.

The symbol of his going out into the darkness alone of late years was well known to his brother officers. He stuffed his whistle away in his pocket, and the familiar pip-squeak was heard no more in the lines of the Punjabis. That was the outward and visible sign of the dying that was taking place within.

" What poor old Lad wants to set him up is a touch of the real thing," said his Colonel, " a ruddy, old, rousing, red-hot fight."

And in the mess of the native officers the Subadar-Major, grand old Maharaj Singh, said the same thing with equal confidence.

" The Major Sahib will emerge into the light like the sun from behind clouds when the battle is joined."

And it looked as if the cure might be forthcoming any day, for those were perilous times. Sherpur was a partially beleaguered city. There were daily forays, excursions and alarms ; and behind them all the shadow and the memory of that first fatal occupation of Kabul by a British Army under Keane and Cotton forty years before.

The Afghans, too, had not forgotten their success of those days against the same invaders. The aged Mullah

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Mushk-i-Allam preached an impassioned Jehad throughout Kohistan, and the ladies of the deposed Yakub Khan lent powerful aid.

Early in December the Afghan Army took the field to do to the Feringhis what their fathers had done to Elphinstone's column in the Khurd-Kabul pass in '42. Mahomet Jan advanced from Ghazni on the capital with an army reported to be like the sea in multitude.

Bobs sent out three columns to meet him, Baker and Macpherson with the infantry to the north, and a cavalry column under Massey along the Ghazni road. The hoped-for junction between the infantry and cavalry was not effected, and Mahomet Jan fell like an avalanche on the little cavalry force. When Bobs galloped up to the sound of the firing, he found four Horse Artillery guns of Smith-Wyndham's battery and three hundred sabres, British and Indian, opposed to some ten thousand Afghan regulars and wild Ghilzais coming over the plain like a tidal wave.

Bobs took in the situation in a glance. If Mahomet Jan's advancing swordsmen could be held up till Macpherson's belated infantry came up from behind the heights across the Chardeh Valley the little column would be saved, and Kabul with it. If not, both were lost. Infantry were the dire need of the moment—infantry.

He sent back Hills at the gallop to Hugh Gough with orders to despatch infantry at full speed to cover the Deh-i-Mazang defile through which the broken column must retreat. Five minutes after Hills galloped into Sherpur the Jat company of Pank's Punjabis were issuing from Highlanders' Gate at the double, led by Old For-ever at his camel trot. It was two miles to the mouth of the defile through the Asmai heights and another half-mile through the gorge. From the moment Hills galloped

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into Sherpur to the moment old For-ever at the head of his double company debouched from the defile on to the plain where the losing battle was being fought, was little more than half an hour.

Bobs came galloping up through the dust.

"Who are you?" he called in his high-pitched voice.

"Pank's Punjabis, sir," answered Old For-ever.

The little man peered through the dust.

"Is that Lad Oliver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where *do* you spring from?"

"Sherpur, sir."

"You've come on wings, then," said Bobs. "And well for us. We've lost two guns. You must cover the retreat of the column and then retire on Sherpur."

He pointed to a confusion of men and horses straggling through the dust towards the mouth of the defile.

"That's your job," he said. "Cover that."

"Very good, sir," answered Old For-ever, and turned to his panting men. "Chal, baba!" he called—"Come on, babies!"—and advanced to meet the tumult.

It was not quite a rout, but it was mighty near one: his experienced eye told him that straightway. About the retiring troopers were all the signs of men with their tails down but not demoralised—as yet.

"Steady, my sons!" he called in his strong voice, as he strode through them. "You've plenty of time. Give my fellows a chance to get through."

"God bless you, sorr!" shouted a wounded Irish cavalry man.

"God help you!" muttered an English ditto.

Lancers, Bengal and British, trailed by on beaten horses, the points of their lowered pennants bloody. Troopers who had been dismounted in the fray tramped

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doggedly along in their heavy boots with the awkward duckling gait of dismounted cavalry, some tripping over their long swords, some still carrying their lances over their shoulders. Two artillery teams without their guns, wounded men on the lead horses, wounded men on the limbers, jogged hopelessly along. At the tail of the column a solitary Horse Artillery gun, unescorted, was firing case at the white-clad tribesmen advancing in waves with flashing tulwars under glorious green banners.

"It's a wonderful sight," said Old For-ever with a gleam of quiet enthusiasm as his company cleared the column, "*wonderful.*"

Just then there was a fierce and strenuous commotion in the detachment about the barking gun that was now the only thing between the Punjabis and the enemy, an isolated stubborn islet waiting apparently to be inundated by the advancing tide. The gun rear-limbered up and came through the Jats at a heavy trot.

"That's my last packet of sweets," said the subaltern, gaunt-eyed but game, as he passed. "I can't do anything more but spit at 'em. Good luck. And I wish you joy of your job."

He was gone into the dusty confusion from which Pank's Punjabis, that regiment of many races, was emerging, all in khaki, with swarthy faces and gleaming eyes, the Colonel on his bony waler towering above his marching men. Company by company the regiment extended and stretched athwart the line of Mahomet Jan's advance.

The old Colonel was killed in the hour of his pride just as the movement was completed and the regiment lay across the Ghazni road with their backs to the defile and their left on the Kabul River. Then Old For-ever took command. The glow that had lighted him as he

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led his company through Highlanders' Gate was now ablaze. He was happy.

The men saw it, especially his Jats. They nudged each other, while the Gurkhas grinned and the Sikhs licked their lips.

"The Major Sahib smiles."

"Verily he loves the battle."

"Our father is happy once again."

"He has come forth from behind the clouds like the sun after rain, even as said the Subadar-Major Sahib."

Then there was a chuckle all along the line. The Major had taken out his old briar-pipe.

"Now he lights his little hookah."

"That has lain in the shadow of his pocket since the darkness descended on him."

"Hark ye, my brothers! In a short time if these fellows come on, the little whistle that cries like a baby will appear. It is I, Sher Afzul from Yuzufzai, who say it."

The appearance of the infantry and their steadiness had given pause to Mahomet Jan's army. They shouted insults across the way, brandished their long knives, shook their banners, but hung in their advance.

"They think we're the head of a brigade," said Old For-ever to the Adjutant. "They'll know we aren't when we begin to retire."

He waited till the dust in the defile told him that the cavalry and the guns were well away. Then he began his retreat.

V.

At the crisis of the Mutiny, when men were raising irregular corps out of the dust of the earth, and arming anything loyal that had ever handled a broom, it was young Lad Oliver who first discovered the fighting cap-

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acity of the Jats, those simple Bœotians of the great peninsula, beloved of all, the butt of all, workers by nature, tillers of the soil, husbandmen by instinct and tradition and warriors only when Necessity drives or Love calls.

They have not perhaps quite the panther-like *élan* of the lithe Sikhs, nor the bull-pup joy in battle of the little Gurkhas. Old For-ever always said himself that the fighting of his Jats reminded him of that of an English county regiment. It was more solid than showy, and none the less terrible for that.

"My fellows are what I call very *satisfactory* fighters," he once remarked in a rare moment of expansion.

It was perhaps because he had discovered them in his youth that he loved them so in his middle age. Certainly it was because he loved them so—and well they knew it—that their fighting under him had long been a legend on the Frontier.

Now, just before he gave the order to retire, Old For-ever stalked along the line of the Jat company.

"Is it well, my children?" he called.

"Sahib, it is well," came the quiet answer all down the line.

Then the retirement began in échelon by companies, the regiment always maintaining the same length of front to the advancing enemy.

On the left, resting upon the river, was the Sikh-Dogra double company; then in order, Pathan-Punjabi Mahomedans, Gurkha-Garhwals; and on the right, extended across the Ghazni road, and bearing the main weight of the attack, the Jats.

Old For-ever was always with the rear company of the moment, handling his men as a fine horseman handles a clean-bred horse.

At dusk as they neared the defile, and the gap between

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the river and the road narrowed, he shortened his front of necessity, and sent word along to continue the movement down the gorge by companies from the left.

" My Jats and I will close the door," he said.

The Sikh company on the extreme left demurred, saying that the Jats as always were going to have the pick of the fighting. It was only when Puffing Billy pointed out that to them had fallen the honour of bearing home the body of the old Colonel, who had himself originally commanded the Sikh company, that they agreed to delay the settlement of their old-standing feud with the Jats and went. The other companies followed in succession and disappeared into the defile.

Old For-ever watched the movement through his glasses. When he turned to find his two Jat orderlies standing between him and the enemy with arms outspread like wings to cover him from the singing bullets, he smiled.

" As a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," he murmured, and gave the order to retire.

The Sikhs, as it proved, were wrong. The thick of the fighting was over by the time the Jats turned their faces home. Mahomet Jan's men, it seemed, had had enough. The pressure suddenly ceased, and the main body of the enemy swept off across the river to take the Takht-i-Shah.

" Macpherson treading on their tail, I expect," said Old For-ever.

He retired at his ease through the defile in the growing dusk. There was no nagging, no sniping even from the heights on either hand. As the Jat company emerged from the gorge, he pulled out his penny whistle.

" And now a little harmony, I think," he said. And in a moment the slow and solemn strains of " Three

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Blind Mice" rose out of the night with a good many halts and havers above the shuffle of the marching feet. So absorbed was the player that he did not see the little man on the curly-eared Kathiawar stallion standing on a mound beside the road with a lancer orderly as the company marched past. It was not till the horseman spoke that Old For-ever was aware of his presence.

"Is that you, Lad?"

The thin squeak stopped abruptly. The player, for once taken aback, thrust his pipe into his pocket alongside his revolver with much the air of a boy caught cribbing.

"Yes, sir."

The horseman rode up alongside.

"You've saved the column. You've saved Kabul. You've saved the guns," said Bobs huskily.

"Not I, sir," Old For-ever answered simply. "My Jats. To them give any glory—under God."

The little General started off as always at headlong speed for Sherpur, then pulled his horse suddenly on to his haunches, and came back under the brilliant night, feeling his pocket.

"I was forgetting," he said. "A dak's come in. There's a chit for you. I brought it along—in case you got through."

He handed a note; then striking a match and sheltering it in glowing hands bent down from his saddle to light the man on foot.

Old For-ever glanced at the note.

"It's from Marion," he said.

In the darkness the little man above him gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"I thought so," he said, sheltering the match. "Won't you read it?"

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The other pocketed the letter.

" When I get in, sir. Thank you. I'll tuck the men up first. They deserve it."

Bobs threw away the match with a little grunt.

" Queer fellow," he said. " Hardly human," and he was gone at a gallop into the night.

VI.

Nobody who saw Pank's Punjabis, dusty, draggled, march into cantonments through Highlanders' Gate that evening, bringing with them the body of their Colonel, all their wounded, and many of their dead, are likely ever to forget it. The men of the garrison turned out to greet them ; and the survivors of the shattered cavalry column, horse-gunners, lancers, native cavalry, emerged from lines and messes and even hospitals to cheer. The regiment of many races took the ovation variously—that is to say, according to the company. The Sikhs brandished their rifles and thundered with the glorious swagger of their race, " Granth ke jai (Victory to the Granth) ! " the Gurkhas showed their teeth and wagged their tails ; while the rear company, the Jats, as always, shy, solid and undemonstrative, hung their heads and glanced up furtively out of the corner of their eyes, to see whether the Major Sahib was satisfied. And there was no doubt he was. When they saw that they broke into the happy laughter of a bevy of girls blessed by a beloved mother.

Hugh Gough, commanding the garrison of Sherpur, who had been told about that note in old For-ever's pocket, came up when the regiment had reached their lines.

" Won't you fall out, Lad," he said, " and let some of us see your fellows to bed ? "

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"Very good of you, sir," answered the other. "But I think I'll stand by. There may be a bit of trouble. We're an assorted lot, you know."

It was not till he had seen the men established that he retired to his own quarters. There, by the light of an oil-soaked rag, he read the chit from Marion. It was brief and ran :—

"DARLING,—Had a toughish time but am through now. Our boy is a fine lad and a fighter. He bites his mother daily to the best of his toothless ability. May God love you and keep you and the regiment.

"M."

The Subadar-Major, who as a lad had fought the Sahibs at the crossing of the Sutlej, and then had been at the raising of the regiment as an irregular rifle corps by Pank in the darkest days of the Mutiny, coming to report that the sepoys of the Sikh company were taking off their belts to the Jats, while the merry Gurkhas were bouncing about on the edge of the fray, found his new commanding officer on his knees. Being the gentleman he was, Maharaj Singh saluted the back of the kneeling Sahib, and retired soft-footed as he had come, leaving Old For-ever alone with his joy and his glory.

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XII.

THE CAPTURE.

For a bewilderingly intricate variety of reasons that stretch far away back into the dark horizon of world-strategy there is allowed to exist to-day, in the long narrow strip of grim, grey, labyrinthine hills which lie like a jig-saw puzzle between India and Afghanistan, a wild picturesque race of people, still almost primitively barbaric, yet with wit or instinct enough to be the finest guerilla infantry in the world, whose national industry is rifle-stealing and mutual murder. As their own rough ragged country is too lean to feed them, they, like all highlanders of old, believe that the rich fat lowlands of India, basking in plenty below, have been providentially provided by the goodness of Allah for their own special maintenance and diversion. To check the logical outcome of this simple but exceedingly troublesome faith, a chain of outpost forts stretches at irregular intervals along the whole length of the border, keeping watch and ward over all the infinite network of routes that thread down to where the mazy foothills gradually merge themselves into the wide flat plains of British India. Through the shimmering heat-haze of the plain you see these forts, grey mud battlements, and tiers of loopholed turrets, surmounted by flagstaff and wireless masts, rising on the billows of the hills like great warships on a heaving sea.

A microscopic entity in our far-reaching frontier prob-

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lem, I found myself one sweltering June, with a squadron of Punjabi Musalmans and Dickie Harland, my youthful subaltern, in occupation of Fort Zamindra. I lay in pyjamas on a *charpoy*, melting beneath the languid punkah in that state of semi-stupor which mercifully deadens the misery of some part of the hot-weather day. I had long since given up a one-sided combat with the swarms of man-eating flies who fought clamorously among themselves for my body, and I wondered dully—in my semi-conscious state—if it could be possible that this inert lump of flies'-meat, with which I seemed to have some remote connection, and which was now being ignominiously devoured piecemeal beyond the backs of beyond, had once passed through four years of a clash and glamour in the very heart of the universe more tremendous even than the wonderful Napoleonic era. No; it could only have been a dream—after working for promotion exams., perhaps. Nothing was real—except these cursed flies and the heat: all else illusion. A long-nosed, loud-voiced Uncle Sam of a mosquito, with a nasal Yankee twang, having reinforced the enemy and piqued me to the bone and consciousness, I suddenly sat up, resolved to make one more despairing effort to defend my life. As I hung over the edge of the bed like a wet sock, my eyes fell on Dickie. Five weeks in our sun-baked mud-oven had failed to rob his cheeks of their young freshness or his eyes of their sparkle. He was staring through his field-glasses, into the mists of heat, at the hills beyond. Maps and an open gazetteer of the district lay on the table beside him.

"How now, Richard," I said. "You'll blind yourself looking into that glare."

He sighed yearningly. "I'd love to know all that goes on in there!"

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It is natural that the barren fastnesses of that grim country, where every man goes armed, and whose borders it is death to cross, should hold a peculiar glamour for high-spirited British boys. Their imaginations are captivated by endless legends of savage ferocity and romantic heroism. Here, before their very eyes, they see a real live country teeming with adventures far more thrilling than anything they've ever read in books ; and they are seized with a fascination, an irresistible craving to penetrate the veil that shrouds from their eyes all the mystery and illusion, all the storm and passion of those wild incredible places and people. Remembering my own early days, I divined instantly what was passing in Dickie's mind.

" Do you think," he asked, " there's any chance of a show ? "

" Why this blood-lust, my Lion Heart ? " I replied.

" Well, you know, it's pretty rotten hearing you all bucking in mess about how you won the war when a fellow hasn't seen any service."

" And doubtless pretty boring," I thought, though for the sake of discipline I didn't say so.

I was relieved of having to answer by the entry of an orderly from the wireless room with a message from the headquarters of our independent brigade, sixty miles back on the Indus. I read aloud : " Daring raid during early hours morning on picket of 217th Infantry at Mullazai. Believed to be work of Kali Khan's gang. Raiders got away with seven rifles. Keep vigilant watch in your area and hold party in readiness to co-operate with police if required. Repeated all Fort Commanders."

" Kali Khan ! " shouted Dickie. " By Gad, if we could only catch old Kali Khan ! "

Kali Khan was a notorious outlaw, the hero of innumerable exploits of consummate craft and daring that had

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gradually come to acquire an almost legendary fame; and as these exploits, brutal enough in all conscience, were occasionally tinged with traces of a rough chivalry and humour, he was regarded by frontier officers with something of that peculiarly British, half-amused, half-respectful affection with which they look upon a gallant fox or foe.

"I say, major, we simply *must* catch him!"

I looked at the flushed young face. It is a graceless thing to discourage youth's impulsive enthusiasm. So I checked the remark that was rising to my lips about a needle in a haystack, and said instead, "Rather! But you see our orders! which in plain Saxon means nothing, because Kali Khan isn't going to be such a fool as to try and cross the frontier by day; and we couldn't, even if we were allowed, patrol seventeen miles of this country by night. Besides, there are five other fort areas he could cross in, so it's five to one against his coming this way at all."

"I *know* they'll try to come this way. And if we hared off back to the Pabbi-Mathru road we might catch the whole bally gang before they got anywhere near the border. If we start at once we can get there long before they can, and they've got to cross it some time. Do let's have a shot, major!"

"I don't know about leaving the fort," I vacillated. "Suppose further orders came, and we were wild-goose chasing elsewhere?"

"That'll be all right," urged Dickie. "Leave someone to look after the mouldy fort, and we'll push off with the rest. Come on, be a sport, major. You said yourself we can't do any good sitting on our hunkers here!"

Fifteen years ago I too had tried to harry the border like a flame—even as Dickie burned to do now; and never

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a raider had I caught. Indeed, once the raiders succeed in their initial *coup* of lifting the rifles it is almost an impossibility to prevent them from slipping home under cover of darkness. The whole country for at least fifteen miles on our side of the frontier is one vast, interminable, mazy warren of inter-communicating fissures, nullas, and hollows, a huge natural-trench system, in which the raiders can move out of sight by day, and over which cavalry cannot go; and only once in a thousand times are they ever caught. Nevertheless, I reflected, it would be good for men and horses to be stirred out of the lethargy of this Turkish-bath life; it would be good to indulge Dickie's zealous ardour—and above all *anything* to escape those cursed flies and Uncle Sam, the mosquito of the poignant pique.

"Right-o; we'll have a dash."

"Who-hoop!!" yelled Dickie. "Come on, let's make our plan."

He spread out the maps, compasses and measuring-wheel. Next to his ponies, field-glasses, sword, the squadron and a little lady who was at that moment methodically flirting with two or four other bright lads in the scented shades of Kashmir, Dickie loved making the plans of military manœuvre.

"Come on," he cried joyously. "You're Foch, I'm Haig, and old Kali Khan is Ludendorff. We'll tie him up in knots in no time! It's great," he gurgled, "to be doing the real thing instead of just schemes!"

The Great High War Staff then proceeded to work out their mighty offensive—while the punkah wheezed asthmatically, and great drops of perspiration fell steadily on to the war map. Before us was the border. Behind us a belt of about eleven miles of bewilderingly broken no-man's-land, peopled sparsely by unfriendly friendlies.

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At the back of that, parallel to the border, ran the Pabbi-Mathru road, and at the back of that again, the immensity of British India. It was decided that the only possible chance of intercepting the raiders would be while they were crossing that road. Our fort area included a stretch of seventeen miles of it, bounded on the north-east by the village of Pabbi, on the south-west by Mathru, with Jatta village in the centre; and a telegraph line ran along the whole length of the road. After weighty deliberation we drew up the following plan of campaign: the left half-squadron was to remain in the fort under the Risaldar-Major, with one troop ready to co-operate as ordered in the wire, and the other troop—in that eventuality—to remain holding the fort: the right half-squadron to move out and capture the raiders. The army of the right, under me, was to be responsible for the portion of road Mathru-Jatta; the army of the left, under Dickie, for the portion of the road Jatta-Pabbi. Headquarters at Jatta. On three considerable peaks, commanding the whole length of road, signalling pickets were to be posted, to sweep the country with telescopes and instantly report any movement to Jatta. Likewise any orders or information received by the fort wireless were to be transmitted by telegraph to Jatta. Such were the dispositions for daylight. Those for the hours of darkness were more elaborate, and will be chronicled in due course. Lastly I wired for my car to be sent out to Jatta at once.

Half an hour later the armies of the right and left clattered through the great outer gateway of the fort and down the sharp boulder-strewn declivity into the broad, shallow-bottomed valley below—much like the retinue of a mediæval baron leaving his castle for the Crusades. Behind scrambled ten mules laden with miles of the

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lightest field-telephone wire, with which those frontier forts are always plentifully stored.

Soon we came to the parting of our ways. The intense expectant eagerness shining out of Dickie's face, like a racehorse at the post, gave me a qualm of uneasiness.

" Remember," I admonished, " there's a wife and three children depending on this. For God's sake don't do anything idiotic and get me broke."

" It's all right, major," he responded gleefully. " Don't fuss—and I bet you anything you like we cop old Kali Khan."

" It's against my principles to bet with minors," I said, " but if we do, I'll have out a case of bubbly and a ton of ice."

" Right—it's a bargain ! " and he vanished over the ridge, looking back to wave a cheery hand.

I rode along down the valley at the head of the army of the right, whose main body, when the front, flank and rear patrols had gone out, consisted of sixteen lances. " A noble command," I reflected, " and a noble rôle—chasing a mangy rifle-thief—for a man who led his regiment from Cambrai to Cologne. How one does go up by leaps and bounds ! "

We pushed on as fast as possible along the valley, past a rich spring of natural oil, as yet unexploited, and perhaps, on account of the climate and neighbours, for ever unexploitable. Then a thin trickle of water began to appear in the wide arid bed of the nulla, which slowly broadened out into a silver ribbon that some miles on fell tinkling deliciously into a deep rocky pool, set like an emerald in the desert. Shading its cool clear surface were palms and fragrant trees, intertwined with wild grapes. On its still water floated deep-red lotus cups ; and the air around was heavy with the scent of almond blossom.

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Sighting it from afar off horses neighed and men licked their parched lips ; while all the time the sun relentlessly bored holes in our backs. " Curious ! " I thought, " how heaven and hell can meet on earth."

While watering the horses and drinking from our *chaguls* or canvas water-bottles—which, slung in a net below the girth, are always ice-cold from the joggling about and evaporation, even on the most blistering day —we were suddenly startled to attention. Away on the left a single rifle-shot rang out, followed quickly by some more, followed shortly after by the rapid chatter of a Hotchkiss gun. The army of the left was engaged ! The old thrill of long ago came back. Obviously I must get with all speed between Dickie and the border, to cut off the enemy should they escape him. We moved rapidly to the head of a deep ravine, which instinct told me would be their natural bolt-hole. Hardly were my pickets placed and a dismounted ambush in position before we saw about a dozen gaunt figures lolloping up the ravine towards us. " Steady," I whispered, " we've got 'em cold ! Not a shot till I give the word."

Another minute and they were right on us. A sickly feeling came over me They were ordinary, very scared villagers, with spades in their hands.

" We'd been working for the Khan of Jatta," they explained indignantly, " and were going peacefully home to Zam when the Sirkar fired on us."

Dickie galloped up in time to hear this explanation.

" Their spades looked exactly like rifles at a thousand yards," he protested. " I thought they must have been the raiders ! "

The Government does not take a lenient view of such incidents.

" Anyone hit ? " I asked anxiously.

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" No, by the grace of Allah, though Fathu's hand was grazed by a rock splinter."

" Thank God for that ! " I ejaculated. " Dickie, you mutton-headed ass, if you'd hit any of them—bang had gone my little ones' bread and butter and boots."

" I'm most awfully sorry, major," he faltered miserably. " I suppose you won't go on with the scheme now ? "

His crestfallen face was pitiable to behold.

" When we get back to cantonments," I growled, " you will take out those rotten Hotchkiss gunners of yours every morning for a month and teach them to shoot. Meanwhile we may as well see this show through now."

Fathu having been handsomely squared, and having earnestly protested his willingness to be shot at at the same range and on the same terms any time we liked, we hurried on again to make up for lost time.

A wire forwarded on from the fort awaited us at Jatta, saying that it was probable that the raiders would try to get home through our area. This stimulating news completely wiped out of Dickie's mind any lingering traces of mortification. As soon as the look-out signal pickets were posted, he threw himself into the night preparations with dynamic energy. These were on a titanic scale. His idea was no less than to link up the entire length of road from Mathru to Pabbi with a continuous trip wire. This was to be made of the field-telephone wire, lightly attached to telegraph posts about a foot above the ground ; and at intervals along the whole extent were to be huge bonfire flares, each connected up to several sections of the trip wire, so that no one could cross the road in the dark without lighting a beacon that would be visible for twenty miles around.

The vast work had been carefully organised. Everyone knew his particular job. The wire was run out at a trot

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simultaneously from Mathru and Jatta, Jatta and Pabbi. Dickie requisitioned ten bullock carts with amazing celerity, loaded them up with brushwood and hay and despatched them under trusty dafadars to the places previously appointed for the beacons—and he himself whirled up and down the road like a moving pillar of dust in my car, adjusting the wire where necessary, laying down with his own hands the flares, posting pickets, generally superintending the vast design.

When at last the sun flamed down behind the jagged border peaks in a white hot ball of fire, and our observation posts had come in, we knew that all our preparations were made, and that the raiders were still on the British side of the road. I began to get nearly as excited as Dickie. He and I were to remain at the central point of Jatta, in telephonic communication with all the pickets on either side. If any beacon lighted, the two nearest pickets on each side were to close in on it at a gallop; and Dickie and I with the four picked shots of the squadron and a Hotchkiss gun were to dash to the spot in my car. Even so I did not try to disguise from myself that the task was practically hopeless; for unless the raiders ran right into one of our pickets I believed they could easily slip through in the darkness—even if they did fire a flare. Still, I could not help getting more and more excited.

When darkness had fallen we took up our headquarters on the highest roof of Jatta. It was a queer scene, that flat mud roof, under the dome of a brilliant Eastern night; the native village, full of unfathomable mysteries, huddling close in the shadows; Dost Mohamed, the telephone operator, crouching, black-bearded, gleaming-eyed, over his instruments; and two white officers, spurred and revolvered, in shirt sleeves, too hot, too tired,

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too excited to rest, pacing ceaselessly up and down with eyes straining, straining along the road.

The hours passed: long leaden hours. Excitement was becoming numbed by weariness. Suddenly Dickie uttered an exclamation. Away on the left a great tongue of fire leaped into the sky. "Come on!" he cried. As we rushed through the darknesss towards the eerie, lurid glare, our minds were filled with indescribable anticipations—tortured by agonising hopes and fears. In less than ten minutes we were on the spot. The two pickets were already there—and had captured the raider, who was a stray camel that had blundered into the wire and was now blinking stupidly at the blaze he had provoked.

"Never mind, Dickie; better luck next time!"

"Anyway the flares work," he replied.

We returned to our vigil on the roof. How those interminable hours passed I shall never know. Hot weather weariness is a thing apart. We propped our eyelids up with our fingers. At last, after several eternities, I shook Dickie roughly by the shoulder. "Look!" I said. He was all alert in an instant. Out on the right this time a huge column of flame glowed and quivered against the sombre background of the hills. Another mad rush through the night. We passed the galloping picket on the way. A moment later, in the fitful glare of the flames, we saw a confused medley of horses and men of the other picket all mixed up with a lot of tribesmen in white robes —peculiarly wild and fantastic-looking in that ghastly light. I switched on my headlights full. On the road, slung lengthways between two long bamboo poles, was a white linen-covered bier. Again our hearts sank and our faces fell. A great red Esau of a Wazir, whose voice boomed out of his mighty chest like a temple gong, furi-

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ously demanded to know the meaning of this interference with the sacred rites of a funeral.

"Where have you come from?" I asked in Pashtu, to gain time.

"My wife's brother's wife died of the cholera over here in Pirbala," he thundered, "and, according to our custom, we are taking her back by night for burial in her birthplace across the border."

That was, we knew, the custom. He produced a permit from the headman of Pirbala in corroboration.

"Sold again!" groaned Dickie.

Scowling and muttering, they picked up the bier. There were thirteen of them, and having settled it on the shoulders of eight—four in front and four behind—they started off in a swinging jog-trot down the road, chanting the refrain—

"La Allah, ill'all la."

But something curious suddenly struck me.

"Stop them!" I ordered sharply, "and make them put the bier down under the head-lights of the car."

Volubly raging, and calling down dreadful curses on me and more especially on their co-religionists for perpetrating this unspeakable sacrilege, they were compelled to obey at the point of the rifle.

"For a lady who died of a wasting disease this is a very large and heavy bier," I said.

This remark evoked an even more violent outburst of cursing and lamentation.

"Dickie, lad," I whispered, "this is a ticklish business. Our men, being all Musalmans, are pretty shaken by this violation of their religion. You and I have got to do the job; and if I've made a mistake, it's going to be devilish awkward"

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Dickie nodded. The blaze of the fire was flickering low, illuminating in fits and starts the fierce faces and gleaming eyes of the tribesmen and the troubled anxious faces of our men. Full in the pale ghostly beam of the headlights lay the bier—beyond, thick darkness, full of formless shapes. Dickie and I strode up to the bier, removed the jasmine wreath, stripped off the linen cloth.

"She has been dead a whole day," bellowed Esau, "and Allah will strike us all with cholera if you do not desist from this foul deed."

We prised open the lid, and then reeled back, retching with nausea. Swathed in a linen shroud, and almost liquefied by the disintegrating heat, was indeed a corpse.

The tribesmen, led by the booming bass of Esau, prayed frenziedly to Allah for vengeance. Our men stirred and fidgeted uneasily.

"Come, Lion Heart, once more!"

We tied out handkerchiefs over our mouths and noses, and, with a great effort, lifted out the loathsome thing. As it dropped on the road, a hairy foot with cloven hoof started out of the folds of the shroud. It was the loveliest sight I had ever seen. I turned to Esau—

"Oh, Holy One, was thy wife's brother then married to a *goat?*"

The terrible suspense and tensity of religious emotion had passed. A roar of relieved laughter went up from our men. Eager hands, trembling with excitement and triumph, took out of the coffin the thirteen rifles of the raiders with some knives, pistols and revolvers, as well as the seven rifles they had just lifted. Dickie looked on in a sort of rapturous trance. Clapping him on the back, I pointed to Red Esau. "Let me introduce you," I said, "to your captive, old Kali Khan. Bring 'em all along to Jatta, while I go on and wire for that bubbly and the ice."

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XIII.

A REGRETTABLE INCIDENT.

We lay just outside Fort X., and were part of a 'containing' force—that is, one which holds the enemy by the ear, while another force goes for his nose. Our rôle was, therefore, more or less a passive one. It consisted of patrols and escorts by day, and by night of being fired into from dark till dawn. We found some slight recreation in setting booby-traps along our telegraph line, which was cut nearly every night, and in devising sudden and unexpected flares for the night firers. In this way we made a small bag now and again, but we were sufficiently bored with things. Some bright spirit in an office a long way off had caused us to be saddled with the latest thing in transport—to wit, donkeys. We loved them by day, for they were humble, docile, little animals, and fully appreciative of kind treatment and regular feeding. But this led to unseemly exhibitions of happiness by night. Their brays banished all slumber. They were soon abolished, and our old familiar friend, the mule, who, if he bit and kicked by day, was quiet by night, took his place.

We were very glad, therefore, when orders came one night for a squadron of ours to carry out a reconnaissance in enemy country next day. We did not notice at the time that these orders were so worded that General Y., who issued them, would get all the credit if things went right, and none of the blame if things went wrong. We realised

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this later. The orders were that the squadron was to go to a certain objective in enemy country and carry out a certain mission, but that risks were not to be taken. It was exactly equivalent to an order to make an omelette without breaking eggs, bricks without straw, or to rob a bee-hive without being stung. However, there it was, and Grey, the squadron commander, was not the man to look too closely into orders on the grounds of the risks they implied.

Next morning it was rouse at 3 A.M., ice in our basins, and a bitter wind whistling round the tents. Half an hour later stamping and jingling betokened that the squadron were assembling. Troop-leaders told off their troops in as low a voice as possible, for we had no wish to advertise our march. Grey came on to parade at four o'clock, and Edwards, the squadron second-in-command, reported the strength on parade to be 54 files. That gave Grey what every squadron-leader liked, one hundred sabres net, after deducting troop-leaders, trumpeters and farriers. Grey, in telling off the squadron, laid especial stress in proving the Numbers Three, for in the rugged precipitous country we were about to enter any action would probably be dismounted, when the Numbers Three hold the horses.

We moved off before the first streak of dawn. The frontier line lay about one mile from camp. Beyond that were three miles of much-cut-up plain, and then the barriers of the hills—tribal territory.

Our first mission was the rounding-up of one of those gaunt desolate towers that dot the border-side. Here it was hoped that we might catch a much-wanted bird, while yet on his perch. As we were groping for the tower in the inky darkness, there arose from it, and guided us to it, the long-drawn, nasally-intoned Third or Morning Prayer—always an impressive sound even when voiced

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from the abode of one whose trade is rapine and whose habit is murder. Followers of Islam are great at tithing of mint and rue.

A cordon was soon thrown about the tower, which loomed out of the darkness, stark, square, tapering slightly from base to top, four-storied; but the lower storey solid, and the next only reached through a small doorway approached by a draw-up ladder. The whole loopholed and machicolated, and the parapet round the top garnished irregularly with boulders of human-head size for the confusion of assailing marksmen. A most uninviting residence, but probably in comfort not much worse than the old Peel towers of our own border. The castellan of such a place was often confined to it for years, sometimes for life (probably a brief one), owing to blood-feuds. To show himself outside was death. Our mountain guns of those days made poor work of these solid edifices, but a little sapping at the base and a charge of guncotton would bring the whole thing toppling like a pack of cards.

Our bird had, however, flown. We had hardly expected to gather such a wily one off the perch. Rumour credited him with a hundred murders; and, having accomplished those on strictly business lines, he had amassed a snug fortune. But his nights were restless ones. He was said to change his bed at least once every night, and never to sleep in the same place for more than two nights. Thus he preserved what to us would appear not quite an ideal existence. But how such a one would have wilted under the ordered existence of civilised life!

Dawn was breaking as we left the tower and took our way over the much-seamed plain that lay between us and the hills three miles away. From the water-eroded crevasses that criss-crossed the plain, a raiding party had suddenly leapt on one of our patrols a few days previous.

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A wounded man, who fell into the raiders' hands, was placed by them on one of the tufts of dry grass that grow hereabouts. A match was put to this, and the man burnt alive. His captors laughed and looked on.

Snow was falling on the higher hills as we entered the foothills. But the sun shone with thrice welcome warmth on our sheep-skinned backs. We advanced with every precaution possible, and small dismounted patrols moved on either flank so long as the ground permitted. Our path was narrow, stony and much broken. Movement was in single file. At about mid-day we entered a nasty defile which figures later in this story. It was more like a narrow cutting clean through a spur of the hill. It was some 400 yards long, and a man could touch either side simultaneously with his hands. The sides were almost perpendicular. Up to here we had passed several stone breastworks, built to command the path. Two contained yet smouldering fires. Doubtless there had been watchers, who had quitted their posts on our approach. But no one was visible, and we passed through the defile without molestation, after having 'made it good.'

Shortly after mid-day we reached the extreme point of our outward march, and halted to feed and water under protection of small pickets. From this point we had a clear view up a long cultivated valley. We observed men running from the fields to the towers. While watering, a couple of hawk-visaged greybeards, looking as ingenuous as such gentry can—which is not saying much—strolled nonchalantly into our midst. Each had hawk at wrist, and their pose was one of honest followers of the chase who had happened upon us. Such folk, however, do not happen on things or people at any time. They were made prisoners, but were soon after let go. There were those amongst us, however, who believed their sport ended

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round the very next corner, and that they might then have been seen as fleet bearers of news concerning our strength and composition.

At about 2 P.M. our homeward march began, not by the route we had come by. We had come by a path following one side of a valley; we were to return by a path following the opposite side of the same valley. In the valley trough, invisible at the bottom of a deep gorge, ran a river. Our homeward path cut right across the flank of the mountain, winding among the spurs and intervening ravines, climbing sharply up salients and diving as steeply into the re-entrants. Above this path was a wilderness of rock and scrub, running very steeply up to the crest-line, a thousand feet above; below, the ground fell in a precipitous jumble of huge rocks to the river a thousand feet below. No rider, however hardy and well mounted, could leave the path. The country was just barely possible for dismounted men to scramble over. It was, nevertheless, admirably adapted to lightly equipped hillmen, unencumbered with boots and spurs and other military equipment. Single file usually, rarely half-sections (*i.e.*, two abreast), were the only formations possible on the path.

When the squadron moved off on its homeward march, Grey went ahead with the advance-guard troop, to complete his road report and sketch. The squadron followed on under Edwards. This minor tactician was now confronted with a problem. He had put out an advance-guard of a troop, and had thereby protected the advance of three troops by one troop. He knew, however, enough of frontier warfare to realise that the most vulnerable part of a force moving homeward is its tail. Yet the drill-book made no mention of the employment of both a tactical advance-guard and a tactical rear-guard. In-

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exorable logic and common-sense, however, carried the day. Edwards depleted his force of another troop, which followed the squadron as rear-guard. Inexorable logic now made further demands. It wanted flank-guards. But common-sense said " No." First, because the ground made it a sheer impossibility, and next, because you cannot dissipate nearly your whole force in order to protect an almost nil remainder. So they moved off with their head and tail protected, but with flanks unprotected.

The days were short. There was not too much light left. No one wanted to be caught out after dark in such a country. The grey-bearded sportsmen, moreover, had reported an excellent road and no defiles. Not a shot had been fired yet, not an armed man seen. Perhaps we were too little apprehensive just when we could never have been apprehensive enough.

All went well till about three o'clock. The sun had then sunk behind a mass of snow clouds that stood about the summits of the higher hills, down whose flanks the snow-line came within a thousand feet of us. Blasts of icy wind rushed down the gullies and took us as we left the re-entrants and crossed the spurs. We were continuously rounding corners or topping a low crest-line

At that moment we, with the main body, heard a sharp outburst of firing somewhere on ahead, though, owing to the echoes and to the accidented nature of the ground, it was not quite certain where the sounds came from. Edwards halted the squadron in a dip of the path, and himself stood on higher ground just ahead. From here he could only see a hundred yards on to where the path disappeared round a rocky escarpment. Nothing further happened, and he was about to resume the march, when the advance-guard troop suddenly came round the bend, moving at a sharper pace than is usual for retiring troops.

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Edwards immediately called over his shoulder to the squadron to dismount with carbines, and then resumed his forward look-out. As the troop neared him, he could see that some saddles were empty and that others held wounded men. But it was not till the leading files nearly rode him down that he saw that something was amiss. He jumped off the path, and the troop swept past him and cannoned into the squadron. But Edwards' present anxiety was not for the troop, which had plainly been caught on the hop and would be all right in a few minutes, but for Grey, who should have come back with it. The missing squadron-leader, however, a few seconds later appeared round the bend, going for all he was worth. As he pulled up beside Edwards, the latter saw that Grey was wounded in the hand, and that the shoe of his sword scabbard had been shot away, exposing the point of his sword. This had wounded his horse on the stifle, which was bleeding freely.

Grey's first words were : " Why haven't you dismounted the men ? " " I have, sir," replied Edwards, without, however, turning to verify his words. " But they're on their horses still," said Grey. Edwards now faced round and looked at the squadron. The leading troop-leader was seated on his horse, impassive, looking to his front, behind a huge rock. Behind him was his own troop, and behind that the second troop. Behind that again was the recent advance-guard troop, now turned about and re-forming. What had happened ? The order to dismount had been clearly given, and must have been heard plainly. What was the leading troop-leader about not to have repeated the order ? Edwards now remembered that this had not been done. But there was no time for questionings or wonderings. Bullets were already kicking up the dust at their feet and singing about their

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ears. The enemy were not a hundred yards off, and still pressing on. Shouting to the men to dismount, Edwards, snatching at his revolver, ran at the leading troop-leader, meaning to put a bullet through him. But ere he had cleared his revolver, he realised that nothing now mattered except to hold off the enemy for the few seconds necessary to get the men off their horses. Failure in this would mean that the enemy would come right on top of the squadron, penned on a narrow path in a ravine. Accordingly he seized a carbine and a packet of ammunition off a trooper, dashed alone up the steep path and opened a rapid fire at the rocks ahead. All he could see of the enemy was an occasional flutter of grey cloth or a glint of weapons. While he blazed away—and undoubtedly his noisy discharges gave the enemy pause—dismounted men joined him. Matters being then momentarily stabilised, and the squadron being in a hopeless place, and further encumbered on that narrow path by the led horses of the men with Edwards, Grey called up to him that he was falling back to a better place, and that Edwards and his little party were to cover the retirement. Away clattered the squadron and disappeared round a bend. Edwards and four men remained in position firing. But there were ominous movements away up amongst the rocks on their right, and shots also now came from this direction. They were being outflanked. Holding on to the last moment so as to give the squadron all the law possible, it was at last a case of a sudden rush to their horses, then mount and away. No one was hit, and they found the squadron about a thousand yards back. Here Grey meant to hold on. And Edwards was ordered to get two dismounted troops into such line as the ground permitted, and to take the offensive. This little force of about twenty carbines had, however, only done about

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two forward rushes, when bullets came thick and fast from invisible people on the right flank. The squadron was outflanked again. The dismounted advance was stayed; one troop was left to hold on to the position, and a retirement to another position was again ordered But this was easier said than done. Dead and riderless horses now encumbered the narrow path. Bullets from jezails and large-bore rifles came thudding in amongst the crowded horses. There were wounded men to get away somehow. At this point Thursby, third troop-leader, had his horse shot under him, and lay under it pinned. Edwards, a great friend of his, lugged him out, and saw him safe up on a horse behind a trooper. But Thursby was immediately shot through his body, and fell off unnoticed in the crush of men and horses. Here he lay, alive but insensible, completely hidden by the long grass and dense bushes, to be cruelly murdered next day by little boys, who stabbed him to death through the face with a lance they had picked up. This we learnt later.

The squadron at last got clear, and fell back, Edwards again covering this, its second, retirement. He and the last of his party at length prepared also to quit the position and fall back. They fired a final burst, then rushed for their horses. Momentarily these five men were gathered in a slight dip. It was to be presumed that as soon as their fire had ceased and they had vacated the position, the enemy would make for it, and not be many seconds in attaining it. Every moment was therefore precious. It was again a case of mount and gallop. This was the position of things when one of the five fell wounded, shot through the chest. A broadening circular stain showed on it, and when he was raised another showed on his back. Clearly a mortal wound, yet he lived, and must

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not be left. Lifting a wounded man on to a horse is not so easy as it often reads. So Edwards found. His desperate efforts to lift the man only covered him with blood. A second man was called off his horse to help. And yet a third was necessary before they could hoist him in front of the N.C.O., a big man on a powerful horse, both equally calm and unmoved. Precious moments had rushed by, but now at last they could get going. The word was given. But here another disappointment awaited them. The wounded man lay like a sack across the front of the N.C.O.'s saddle, and so soon as they began to trot he began to slip off. It was a choice of leave him and gallop, or take him and walk. They chose the latter, but not a man among them believed that in so doing his own life had a dog's chance.

Slowly the distance between them and where they expected the enemy to appear and shoot point blank into their backs increased. Now it grew to twenty yards, and now to fifty. Ahead of them the road turned a corner, and here there would be cover. But the strain of that slow pace was too much for two men out of the five. First one and then the other forged ahead, broke into a trot, and disappeared. Edwards let them go. Keeping them would be no good, and they would increase the squadron by two.

The N.C.O. carrying the wounded man now said: "He's dead now, sir. Shall I let him drop off?" "Not at all," said Edwards. "Bring him into the squadron, and your name shall go up for saving a wounded man. Besides, how do you know he's dead?" "Because he's suddenly got so heavy, sir."

At last they passed round the corner, and breathed more freely. And soon after they sighted the squadron, halted, and its ranks re-formed on much better ground.

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Edwards reported his arrival. The dead man was tumbled off the saddle. The N.C.O.'s name went in in due course, and when, many years later, I met him in France, he was an officer, and wearing the decoration which he won on the occasion above referred to.

But things had been happening with the squadron. Grey, thinking that possibly their outward road—the one with the defile—might still be open to them, since their homeward road was barred, contemplated a return by that route, and as a first step had sent off a troop to hold the defile. This troop was half-way to its objective when Edwards arrived.

But on each hill-top, crag and rock eyes were watching their every movement. This, on the defile, was seen, and its meaning divined. Thereupon, visible to the squadron but not to the troop, scores of figures in fluttering grey could be seen bounding, scrambling and running towards that end of the defile opposite that which the troop would enter.

Every effort was made to recall the troop, which was now a mile distant and only some half-mile from its objective. The messengers sent after it could not catch it up. Signallers were tried, but there were none with the troop, even had the flags been observed. Two trumpeters were set to blow the "Retire," but the call, repeatedly sounded, was not heard. Preceded by a point of three men, the troop rapidly neared the defile, into the farther end of which those hurrying grey figures had now disappeared.

The point entered the defile, and a little later, just as it appeared again at the farther end, the troop, 400 yards in rear, also entered, and passed from sight—passed for good and all. We never saw it again. Some smothered shots were heard. That was all. And we saw the three

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men of the point halt, turn in their saddles and then two of them, the other shot down, wheeled and galloped campwards.

So that exit from the hills was barred.

Grey, so soon as the fate of the troop was certain and it was plain that waiting any longer could serve no purpose, decided on an immediate advance over the road we had just retired down. Twilight was on us ; a cautious advance would bring darkness upon us ; Edwards was told to go with the advance-guard, and to shove along as fast as the ground permitted. Away he galloped, and the squadron, strung out in single file, followed not far behind.

There were some three miles to accomplish to the edge of the hills. Many horses carried two men ; there were wounded men to support in their saddles, tired and wounded horses to urge forward. There was no reason to suppose that the road so recently barred us was now open, or that the whole of the enemy had cleared across the valley to intercept the troop at the defile. The leading section of the advance-guard, seeing so many evidences of their recent retreat in dead horses and men, went a little stickily. To quicken up the pace, Edwards placed himself in the lead. It was jumpy work here for him and the next few men behind him ; but they blundered along at a gallop where the ground admitted among that tangle of rock and scrub, whence a man might be shot down with ease and certainty at a few yards' range without seeing his adversary. Edwards rode sword in one hand, revolver on lanyard fast under his bridle arm. Now they passed the scene of their second retirement—passed without knowing it within a few feet of where Thursby lay. On again to where they first fell back. Then on to where two dead men and three horses marked

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where the original advance-guard troop had been fired on. And then there lay before them a mile and a half of unknown road. This they traversed without losing the path in the gloaming, and without a shot being fired; and so came to the edge of the hills, whence a view could be had of the camp, now just visible below them. Here there was a halt to breathe and count heads; and here it was that Edwards first learnt of Thursby's fate. The trooper assured him that Thursby fell from the horse dead, but could give no clear account of the exact place or time. Two other men, who should have been present and had started with them, were absent. Edwards asked if he might call for volunteers to go back, both for them and on the chance of finding Thursby. He was given permission, but was most strictly limited to a quarter of an hour's absence. Grey, in fact, demanded and was given Edwards' word of honour that he would be back within the allotted time. The latter, with four men, then rode back into the gorge. They met the two absentees, both on one horse which had been unable to keep up, and directing them to the squadron, continued on to the last moment of the minutes allowed them. Then turning back, they rejoined the squadron as it made its way down the precipitous path which led to the plain. Across this, and just discernible in the gloaming, were seen moving towards them horse, foot and guns. Ill news had travelled apace. The two survivors of that defile troop, who had been seen to gallop away, had reached camp and given the news. Hence this succouring force. We should have preferred to have arrived quietly in camp, and there to have given our version of our troubles.

At the bottom of the descent we joined the force; with it our regiment and the colonel—he a right good fellow. I heard him as he met Grey. Some fellows would have

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kicked up a great to-do, but all the C.O. said, in that quiet voice of his, was: "Well, Grey, I see you've had a rough-and-tumble. How did the men behave?" "All well, sir, in trying circumstances and in desperate bad ground—all, that is, sir, but one." "Ah," said the colonel, "we'll talk about that later when you have had a drink and some food. The great thing now is to get men and horses into camp. If you can raise a trot, trot on."

The two men who had galloped into camp had reported that the whole squadron had been scuppered. They told us later that they had passed through the defile without seeing a soul. On hearing the shots they had turned, and seen the place alive with the enemy.

It was a pretty miserable sort of day, and we thought we had finished it when we got to camp. But we had not. We were all fairly well done. We had left camp at 4 A.M., and got back to it at 7 P.M. We had just fed and were going to turn in, when the adjutant ran in to say that all officers who had been with the squadron were to parade on the glacis of the fort.

It was eight o'clock and bright moonlight. The general who had given those queerly-worded orders for our reconnaisance had been apprised of the mishap by lamp signal. He was eight miles away, but for the pleasure of slanging tired men, proving them to have been in the wrong and himself to have been in the right, he had got to horse, and now stood on the fort parapet waiting to harangue us standing below on the glacis. By Jove! how he slanged poor Grey, and then everyone else. He proved his case, and quoted his orders *ad nauseam*. But though he asked questions, he got no answers. I could happily have shot the blatant ruffian as he stood there mouthing out his abuse. He finally burnt out; and as

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he had nothing more to say and there was a silence, our C.O. gave the word, and we walked off, leaving him standing with his filthy mouth open. And when all was said and done, we had a sort of feeling that amounted to certainty that we had made him feel what a beast he was.

Our C.O. had an interview with him next day. Later Edwards was sent for. We asked him afterwards what happened. He said: "The old beast committed the final atrocity by asking me if I would like my name to go in for a V.C." "And what did you say, Tommie?" we asked. "Why," said Edwards, "I gave the usual wheeze, you know: what you say in books and that about only doing my duty, and not doing anything particular to deserve anything. But the old swine not taking that, I had to put it differently. I hope it hurt his feelings, but, of course, I spoke with an air of almost silky deference to him. I said, in the politest way possible, that, of course, I felt I must be wrong, but did the Royal Warrant constituting the award of the V.C. mention anything about it being made at the request of the recipient? He didn't seem to have thought of this, and I terminated the interview as soon as might be. I can't breathe the same air as he does. It incites to mutiny and murder. What oh! Tommie Edwards, V.C., by request—in brackets."

About that wretched troop-leader who sat mounted behind a rock. That sort of thing doesn't bear talking about. I suppose some fellows can't help funking, but God help them if they don't find out till they have become officers. This fellow went—disappeared—no one asked any questions. Courts-martial are not for such offences as his. Least said, soonest mended.

There were intermediaries who came and went between us and the enemy. From them we learnt all sorts of details

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about that day. It was from them that we heard about poor Thursby's fate.

I don't know if I have given the cavalry away by this yarn. But about six weeks later a force of some 7000 men had much difficulty in clearing out of those same hills by that same road, lost very heavily, and were as glad as we were to quit.

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XIV.

THE COUNTER-RAIDERS.

I.

THE big car pulled up with a grinding of gravel under the grey walls of cut, lichened stone, whose lancet-window heads showed black and deep sunk in the strong moon's shadow.

I was distinctly surprised at what I saw as I stepped out, followed by old Colonel Quintin, from whose lips I had gathered wisdom during the journey.

As we swept through the grey winter afternoon over great rolling waves of hard rock-bound country, from which dark mountain humps loomed purple against the western sky, I realised that I was going to see something a little startling to an old Regular soldier. Nor was I disappointed.

To commence with, it was a little unusual to see a whole battalion of infantry forming up right among aeroplanes in line making ready for a night flight.

Colonel Quintin led me through a little belt of acacias on to the rather scrubby turf of the flying-ground.

Three lines of big biplanes stood suffused in a soft but brilliant light, which spread out, low, like a flood over the ground, without glare or dazzle, a few hundred yards to their front.

Already coughs and barks from some of the great engines

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in the foremost rank showed that the work of 'warming up' was in hand.

At the same time platoons of infantry swung with a brisk yet long stride to a halt, one platoon before each towering aircraft.

This was certainly infantry, but yet there seemed something odd and unusual. As I looked and reflected, it struck me that their legs were somehow different. They were not the stumpy supports cylindrically clothed in puttees, and suggesting elephantiasis of the trouser leg, that Thomas Atkins affects. Nor yet were they pipe-stems with ungainly knee-knobs that I had seen on sepoys at Bareilly. I decided at last that they were remarkably like normal human legs of a distinctly sinewy and athletic mould.

"Would you care to have a look at the men?" said Colonel Quintin, breaking in on my cogitations.

He took me up to the right platoon of the foremost body. They were standing easy, smiling and joking in subdued tones, and one tall young man with a single star on his shoulder was chatting in front with a couple of British officers. "This lot are Tanaolis," said Quintin to me, as I looked at the level row of ruddy-brown faces. Here was something quite different, I thought, from my mental picture of the sepoy. These were all tall upstanding lads with clean-run limbs and flat backs, who looked at one out of level unwavering eyes. Straight noses with clear-cut nostrils caught the eye above thin firm lips.

I had seen those alert faces before somewhere, and their almost too regular moulding. Suddenly I remembered. The museum at Taxila, and its long rows and repetitions of Bactrian Greek marbles.

Here, too, was the unmistakable rounding of the Greek

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chin, and the angle of its forehead, as it were Phœbus Apollo.

" Yes," said Quintin, as if he had guessed my thoughts, " it was not until Aurel Stein had published ' Serindia ' that we Punjab officers began to wake up to the fact that most of our men were the direct descendants of the Hellenes of Bactria. What with tribal endogamy and Mendelism, the breed has remained practically unmixed. Also, in these valleys with their cold winters, environment has made little change in the type. Nearly all the children have brown hair, and the majority green or even blue eyes."

He was interrupted by the approach of the captain of the company and a major : Quintin introduced us.

" This is Colonel Rivers, who has come out from the War Office at home to see our little experiment." He added, smiling, " Of course, the Whitehall General Staff are very sick with us Dominion blokes in the Punjab striking out a new line." The major, Dudley by name, was a tall black-haired man with a great breadth of shoulder and length of limb, and far from carrying the stage field officer's corporation. He turned with an engaging smile, remarking, " We are frightful old reactionaries after all. Why, if any of your wild and woolly Labour members were to come along he would call us feudal. Thank God, they can't get in now. As for the regiments, they've gone right back to 1885."

I could not follow what he was talking about, and must have looked puzzled.

" Oh, I should have explained," went on Quintin. " When we broke off from India, one of the first laws passed was an Aliens Act. No one can come into the country unless he is specially invited by one of the provincial Jirgas. Even a military officer or an official comes

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in on probation, and this is not extended unless he shows himself really keen on the country. We find the Sahibs on the Jirgas are stricter about this than the Khans and the Sardars."

This was a little beyond me, so Quintin, seeing it, said, " Never mind, I will try and explain when we have more time. You might like to look at the equipment and all that. It is rather special."

The captain, who incidentally was dressed just like his men, was a pink-faced slight youth with a hard look about his mouth. " These safas are a new thing," he said, pointing to a man's turban. " In the old days in winter the man had a cotton safa, and we gave him a Balaclava cap and a scarf to lug about. Now we just give him a woollen safa in winter. Pashmina, the stuff's called, fine wool of the ibex. Great brain-wave."

The man before whom he halted wore a long smock of khaki, loose, and coming down nearly to the knee. I could not quite make out whether the material was serge or flannel. He lifted up one of the square corners of its lower edge, and showed another beneath it. " Brain-wave too," said he jerkily. " Before, a fellow used to get a rotten tight serge jacket, two or three grey-backed shirts and some vests and a cardigan, and all sorts of tripe to be carted round. Now he has three smocks, all just the same, four if it's very cold, washes them in turn, and wears the whole outfit if it's cold enough. Too easy."

The man's rifle was a very long single loader. This really took my breath away. " Aren't you a little conservative ? " I could not help ejaculating to Dudley.

He smiled again. " No jolly fear, colonel ; we've given up browning the countryside like the unskilled labourists of 1917 and 1918 used to do in France, and hoping that someone would walk into it. When one of our lads shoots,

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it's a funeral. Look, they only carry forty rounds," he said, pointing to four little pockets of khaki drill looped on to a cartridge waist-belt of webbing. " The muzzle velocity is nearly four thousand," he added.

This really seemed to me to be making a fetish of guerilla methods. Even the man's bayonet was a distinctly more slender affair than usual, rather like the old French weapon.

For equipment he wore a harness of drab webbing, with two braces, like the officers' pattern. On his back he carried a large haversack with a water-bottle of aluminium clipped outside. Above this was strapped, hair outwards, what seemed to me to be a hearth-rug. Dudley came to the rescue. " Poshtin," he said ; " sheepskin coat, you know. Worth about three blankets and a greatcoat for warmth, and weighs five pounds. It's a specially woolly sort of sheep, and tanned with mulberry juice with the hair still on."

My brain reeled as I tried to imagine a trooping of the colour with men wearing that sort of Teddy-bear outfit. However, I suppose your Guardsman wears a hairy hat, so why not a hairy coat on the frontier ?

The soldier had no entrenching tool at all, though the bulge in his haversack showed where he carried his mess-tin and rations.

His nether garments were ' plus fours ' of a wide and voluminous variety. The material interested me ; it was cotton certainly, but vastly different from khaki drill. The weave was horizontal, not diagonal, and the material was quite loosely woven and canvassy. I must admit that this was just the fabric and just the cut to give the man real freedom of movement.

I said so to Dudley. He replied, " Yes ; and, of course, it is only the ordinary garment of the Pathan and the

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P.M. slightly modified. The Pathan lives in a country where you have vast extremes of hot and cold, more than anywhere in the world. He also needs the free use of his limbs to pursue his nefarious avocations. So, being a practical scientist, he devised a most scientist trouser, cool to wear when it's 125° in the shade, and warm at 20° below. The old clothing department that we used to be at the mercy of could never see that. They thought trousers were merely needed for polishing office chairs with. However, we changed all that at the G.C.U."

" What's that ? " I asked innocently.

" The ' Great Clean Up,' " he replied with a chuckle. " I'll tell you about that after."

Everything about this strange private soldier was unusual. I looked at his legs.

A pair of woollen hose-tops met his wide knickerbockers just below the knee-cap, and the flash of a ' Highland garter,' its colour a touch of ' panache,' showed how they were secured. The ankles were bound round with two or three turns of a short puttee, and on his bare muscular feet were quaint silver-laced sandals. They made me think of the *cothurni* of the Greeks, or the *caligæ* that a Roman emperor was dubbed from.

" Those," said Dudley, " are the only wear for rough ground and getting about quickly. Half the weight of boots to start with, and, as your racing swine used to say, a pound off a horse's feet is four pounds off his back. They let a man use the ankles God gave him, too. Nothing new, of course. Piffers used to wear them for donkey's years, ever since 1846, until the clothing department spike-bozzled them. Very scientific, anyhow, like the breeks."

I had already gathered that these platoons were each to be embarked in an aeroplane, and so transported to

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the scene of their usefulness. This was nothing new; it had been started as far back as 1922. To-night there was to be a new development, and I was very foggy as to the form it would take. I hesitated to ask Dudley, or his captain, as the twinkle in their eyes told me that nothing would please them better than to pull the leg of a senior General Staff Officer from Whitehall.

At the feet of each man in the platoon lay a long tapering green bundle, festooned with mysterious cords and slings of webbing.

There seemed no apparent reason for this, but when I asked, both Dudley and Quintin seemed to want to talk about something else.

I was much impressed with the appearance of the platoon, of which the smallest man seemed to me to stand a good five feet nine. They radiated vigour and alertness, very different to the grey-faced, hungry, cotton-clad sepoys I remembered seeing in the La Bassée trenches in December '14. Also, they moved very smartly, and were quite different in build and feature from the bulgy-lipped, broad-nosed and spindle-shanked creatures that I used to see when I first soldiered in Hindustan way back eighteen years ago. All the same, their equipment and their armament seemed ridiculously inadequate for any serious fighting. I could have carried it under my arm, and as the chill wind soughed up from the snow-topped hills before me, I shuddered at the idea of a night in the open wrapped in a single sheepskin coat.

I had to dive into my case for a fat Corona Corona before I felt cosy again.

As I stood, the tall platoon commander, on whose chest I noted the ribbon of 1915, with a silver rosette, jerked out an order in English, and the platoon, wheeling to their left rear, picked up each man his tapering bundle, and

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filed, with rifles slung, into the bulging fuselage of their aeroplane.

Its three great propellers were already revolving slowly, with an occasional cough, splutter, or pistol-like report in the silencer.

A mechanic or two stood at each wing-tip. The engines, grumbling, swelled into a roar, and at a word from the squadron commander a sergeant saluted, and the great machine sped off.

Its roar and blast died down as it outlined itself climbing against the white snow of the range that leapt sheer up across the flat-floored valley, whose cornfields and clustered park-like trees showed plainly in the moonlight. A moment later the second machine was off, the third and the fourth.

" There goes A Company," said Dudley. " Whilst they are getting their height and formation you have just a few minutes to look at B. You and I are going in the last machine of B Company."

As I walked with him to where stood the second row of machines, I noticed another body of infantry in fours approaching the edge of the aerodrome. " These," said Dudley, " are the savage battalion of the Rohtas Regiment. When this lot of machines comes back they will take them along as a second trip.

" These three platoons, just going to embark, are Dogras —Rajputs, you know, of the Punjab hills." I did not know, but looked.

These men were smaller than the Tanaoli platoon I had first seen, and with less harsh features and differently shaped headgear, but good-looking withal. I noticed what I had not seen at first : just below the shoulder seam of each man's wide-sleeved pleated smock a little silver badge. Peering at it closely, it seemed like a Greek

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seal gem, a helmeted head, facing to the front. Dudley explained that this was a head of Alexander, who was the national hero of all the fighting tribes of the Punjab and Frontier. The badge had been adopted as the emblem of Punjabi and Frontier regiments when the Punjab seceded from India to be a sort of Ulster. It matched the Canadians' maple-leaf and the rising sun of Australia.

I felt that I must ask more questions. I had realised from something in the newspapers a year or two before that the Punjab had done something or other with respect to India, but I was rather hazy as to its precise significance.

However, the fifth machine's engines roared as the pilot opened her out and throttled down again, so I hurried with Dudley towards the end of the line. The eighth platoon were, I heard, Sikhs, who were taller than the Dogras, with brown and black beards curled up round their chins. I had just time for a glance at the third company with Dudley. These, he told me, were all Pathans. Two platoons he called Khattaks, lean and sinewy, with laughing eyes and black bobbed locks curled up at the ends with oil. Their strong features were even more Greek than the Tanaolis. I gathered that these boasted to have sustained the highest percentage of killed in the old German war.

The other platoons were Yusafzais, fair-skinned, tow-haired, tall and burlier than the rest, and startlingly Western European in feature.

Our machine was ready, and we hurried to the rope-ladder of the gangway. To me, asking, Dudley explained that flying-coats and goggles were unnecessary for passengers, since the aircraft were electrically warmed and completely covered in.

We wriggled between the rows of sitting infantrymen to seats beside the pilot in the protuberant rounded nose.

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The structure was quivering already as the throttles opened to the twelve hundred horse-power. The monstrous machine trundled and bounded along the rough turf like a mere two-seater. As we settled into steady zooming flight I saw the broad flat valley beneath, with its unfenced cornfields gleaming in the silver moonlight, intersected here by the white wavering lines of boulder-strewn stream beds, and there by low dry-stone walls. At the far edge it rose into spurs clad in black pines.

The pilot swept into a steeply banked turn. Dudley remarked that no time could be wasted in getting off, as each machine had to be in its exact position before the formation proceeded. Any error or delay spelt confusion in the dark at the other end.

As we turned I looked at the pilot, and saw, rather to my surprise, that he too was a bearded Sikh.

"This is Mr Malik Singh Jamarwal," said Dudley, catching my glance, and the pilot's white teeth flashed in a smile.

"I belong to the Punjab branch of the Air Force Reserve," said he in Oxonian English. "I used to be in the old R.F.C. during the war."

"He was a hockey Blue afterwards," whispered Dudley, who seemed to think rather more of this.

The machine turned once more, and again we faced, always climbing, towards the black ridge of fir-clad mountain to the north-east, with its white crest.

As we rose, I could see more ranges and more valleys beyond; and peering down through transparent panels, I espied two other machines of our flight below us.

Above, the brilliant moon showed us every detail, even the rigging and the tricolour cockades painted on the wing's upper surface. Hardly less brilliant than the round disc of Artemis was the uncanny glow of the stars

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from a background of infinite blackness. Away to the northward gleamed great snow mountains, and to one side of and below their summits what seemed a huge level white plain suspended in mid-air, like a Laputa made by Mr Buszard.

It took a little thought to realise that this was cloud, and not some solid phenomenon of the unexplored upper valleys of the great river we were approaching.

Things move very slowly in the air, and I had plenty of leisure to look round.

The machine was uncommonly silent. Speech was easy, and the pilot explained that recent advances in the design of air-screws had made a considerable difference in this respect. The details of the passenger accommodation had been improved since my last journey in an aeroplane. Formerly a passenger machine was usually ill-ventilated, stuffy and headachy. This was now remedied, he said, but I could not quite understand how. Another point he drew my attention to was that the structure of the aeroplane was entirely of steel. I quite agreed with him that this was really vital in a country with extremes of heat and cold, grilling sun and driving snow. The little door in the bulkhead opening on the alleyway to what Dudley called the 'Troop deck' was at my elbow and ajar. I looked through to see eight rows of basket-chairs, three abreast, with a narrow gangway running towards the tail of the machine. Each seat was thoroughly well filled by a burly and rather bored-looking Sikh, and even what I had considered the exiguous marching order of the men gave the scene an aspect of repletion, not to say congestion.

I remarked another fresh point. The half-dozen men in the first two rows were armed with a very different weapon to the remainder, and their cartridge pouches also differed.

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The arm was short and stumpy, resembling an old fashioned elephant-gun in the capacious gape of its muzzle. The electric light was distinctly dim, and now the pilot switched it out altogether, so I had to ask Dudley for more explanations.

"Well, you see," said he, "that's what we call a hand howitzer. For years we had been meeting people who spent most of their time behind sandbags, or boulders, or something bullet-proof anyhow. We spent many years and countless tons of lead shooting at them with high-velocity rifles and machine-guns. In 1915, of course, the rifle grenade came in as a feeble sort of extempore stop-gap, but it was not until after the G.C.U. that we got a sensible tailor-made shoot-over-the-rim weapon that you see there. It's a neat little article, makes quite good shooting up to five hundred yards and can just touch seven hundred. It's rifled, of course, and has a very simple instantaneous fuse, rather like the old 106 of the gunners.

"The little shell weighs just eighteen ounces, and is filled with a new stuff called crumpite. You can get off about eight rounds a minute if you want to, and you can fire it from the shoulder. It makes a bit of a jar, but there are a couple of recoil springs that take most of the bump. With that weapon it is no use a fellow getting behind a boulder 500 yards away and plugging you as you pant up the hill towards him.

"You have a few pals with these hand howitzers adjacent, and they soon hoick him out from behind that old rock."

"Don't you have any Lewis guns then, or anything to correspond?"

"No fear," he answered; "we chucked those several years ago, except for the regular battalions, of course.

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I am speaking of the Savage battalion of each regiment."

"What about machine-guns and mortars?" I asked.

"Yes; we have a couple of each in the battalion, but it is a job getting them about on the hillside at the pace we have to move. You have to select your men very carefully, and give them nothing else to carry. It is doubtful if they are worth the weight, but you often get up against a tower, or a strong point or fortified building of sorts, and then the mortars come in handy."

"And the machine-guns?"

"Well, we don't always take them out, but they get their chance when the enemy follow up a withdrawal in any force. If they are careless, your machine-gunner sometimes gets a target that is worth firing at, but pretty seldom.

"In this sort of business you find that if you give even a selected man more than about forty pounds to carry you slow him down a lot, and slow movement gives your tribesman just the opening he wants. It is a very different business from the bludgeon work of France in the old days, and there's much more technique in it."

I began to see Dudley's point, and asked him how range-finding was done, and how they managed for Véry lights.

"Oh, we have that too," said he. "The hand howitzer makes a perfect range-finder, and we have a sort of young star-shell that you can fire out of it, which is better than even the old 1½-inch light.

"There is one little stunt that might interest you. Of course we can have no mules or anything in these shows, but often, when we surprise a village, we catch an odd straggler or two, handcuff him, and commandeer him to carry a machine-gun or a tripod or some little trifle like

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that. Of course you have to watch him very carefully, and prod him gently with a bayonet to make him see reason."

I was still bewildered by several things, especially Dudley's reference to 'savage' battalions. It seemed clear that the unit now being transported in our dozen aeroplanes came under that designation.

My attention was diverted by the wild majesty of the scene that now appeared below us.

We had crossed the first range of hills that had faced us as we stood on the aerodrome. Now to our right was a deep rugged gorge through which flowed the great foam-specked river. Below us it spread out from the iron embrace into wide channels banked with light-grey sand. Ahead, and slightly to the left, there seemed to crouch another great mountain range, parallel to our course, sombre with pines, crested with snow and streaked with the lighter tones of cliff faces. North of it more thinly-clad spurs ran down into a wide valley far away, in which I could dimly discern an occasional prism-shadowed cluster of cubes that were houses.

The far wall of the valley melted away into the dark distance, overshadowed and blackened by low-flying cloudbanks, through which gleamed an occasional snow pinnacle.

Dudley shouted at me as our machine pitched in the air-waves over the river that the great mountain was Aornos, and that our course was shaped well to the south of our objective, in order to avoid alarming the larger villages of the valley. The smaller hamlets of the mountain slopes could neither turn out so many armed men, nor could they move so quickly to concentrate against us. It was for a similar reason that we had approached our objective from the less obvious south-east.

For a minute or two I gazed full of awe and wonder at

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the scene, whilst behind me a mechanic in blue dungarees passed from one engine across the alley-way to another. As he listened to the clatter of valves, the hissing inrush of air, or watched jumping gauge-needles, he had no eyes for the great spaces below us.

The pilot was intent on his map, whereon I noticed a sprawling cross in red ink towards the head of the open valley not far ahead of us. His altimeter needle crawled down from nine to eight thousand feet as I watched, whilst the map showed over three thousand below us. I was about to speak when he turned his mouth to a voice-pipe, and shouted something down it to the interior of the machine. He made a remark to Dudley about being ready in a moment.

I looked backwards through the transverse bulkhead doors, and saw the foremost half-dozen men slinging their strange bundles to their backs, and crawling thus-wise to tiny doors, one on each head of the fuselage.

Dudley smiled as I watched astonished.

The leading soldier opened the door, and, to my amazement, crawled out on to the surface of the lower plane.

I watched his movements through the side-panel of the pilot's cockpit as he braced every muscle against the huge push of the wind blast.

He went out slowly, hand over hand, along a steel rail which I had not noticed before, and which ran from strut-foot to strut-foot along the wing.

As he crawled under the shaft and gearing of the port propeller into the darkness out of sight, I watched the next man.

Both were now wearing their sheepskin coats, and had bound their chins up in the folds of their headgear. Across each man's chest, slung to the harness of the queer bundle

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which now was white and glistening on his back, slanted a long sheath-knife.

The second man, moving with visible effort, braced a foot against a cable anchorage, and released a hand. He opened a door in the plane beneath him, and crawled slowly through it. Whilst the upper part of him was still visible, he fumbled till he found a big hook of bright steel attached somehow to his gear, and clipped it to a bar in the opening of the wing. Slowly then he crawled downwards out of sight, shutting the trap behind him.

A glance behind the pilot's back showed more men thus engaged out on the right wing. Dudley said, " Six at a time, Colonel," and I heard a voice address the pilot through the pipe.

He glanced at his map and peered again downwards through the panel before him. After a few seconds' pause, his left hand went to his linked throttle levers. The roar of the engines became less, and we felt the great machine sink below us.

Picked out by the moon's strong shadow, trees, bushes and boulders on the ground grew rapidly more definite. The altimeter needle jerked back again and again. I noticed the figure five on its dial out of the corner of my eye, as all agog I watched the pilot.

His hand was now on the knobbed head of a long lever by his right side. Dudley exchanged a word with him, then told me shortly to look out at the wing tip. The pilot pulled his lever sharply a foot towards him, paused a second, pulled it again, and again a third time.

Out from below the wing there shot downwards in eerie fashion a dark mass. I caught my breath as I realised it was a man. I lost sight of him, and the rope that trailed behind him, and suddenly my eye caught

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him again from the sheen of the great white umbrella of a parachute that opened swaying above him.

The engine's note swelled to a roar again as we turned sharply to the left. Below I saw six parachutes all swinging and rotating to earth at different heights and distances.

"Going down wind now," said Dudley, and as he spoke the pilot banked and turned again, and the ground sped streakily across the lower panels. Men were still moving in the belly of the machine behind us. The pilot throttled his engines once more, and the process was repeated, though my heart was far less in my mouth this time. Six more parachutes spread white and spun below us.

We turned again for a third time, and Dudley left me, saying, as he expressed it, that he was to 'deplane' now. He crawled aft to put on his gear, and I was left alone with the pilot and the never-resting but dumb mechanic. I felt a little relieved that Dudley had not invited me to don the parachute harness.

We dropped in this wise four batches each of six men, including Dudley; this emptied the aeroplane except for us three.

I ejaculated something to express to the pilot my admiration of the spirit with which the men had gone to this horrifying leap into the blackness of the night. "Well, you know," he answered, "parachutes are pretty safe nowadays. Barely one fatality in two thousand descents. It's a very different thing from the old days."

I had not quite realised that the other three machines that carried B Company had already performed their task. My companion enlightened me. "The next flight with C Company will not be along for nearly ten minutes yet, so I will take you down low, and you can watch the men landing. It may amuse you."

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He throttled down again, and flew up along the river-bed of the valley bottom. Several parachutes were still in the air, and as they landed their cargo, bumping and dragging their man along the ground, I realised the use of the long sheath-knife. One man went straight into the bushy top of a small tree, and from the swaying of the boughs as he cut himself loose from his trappings, I deduced that it might be a thorny one.

We flew back to our aerodrome in much less time than the outward journey had taken us. I must confess that I felt much relieved as I stepped out again to meet Colonel Quintin. "You've been just fifty-five minutes," he said. I should not have been surprised if we had taken that number of hours.

II.

"The reserve companies of the two battalions are close by here. The B.O.'s have very kindly offered us a shake-down for the night. The pilots of the reserve machines are here too. After all these hours in the fresh air, no doubt you would like a spot of supper too," said Colonel Quintin. "To-morrow," he added, "you will see Act ii., Scene 1, of our little drama."

We walked together past a grove of plane-trees, through which a pleasant little brook trickled and bubbled between grassy banks. In a few minutes we sat before a roaring and very welcome log-fire in a big wooden-raftered room. Half a dozen young officers in khaki and a like number in the blue of the Air Force made us welcome.

A great dish of stewed mutton was washed down by rum and milk, and I felt then that Richard was himself again.

Quintin and I were too busy eating and drinking to talk much, but he explained that fourteen machines made

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each trip carrying three companies of a battalion, the two odd machines carrying the mortar platoon, signallers, stretcher-bearers and battalion headquarters.

Two battalions were being used that night, making about three hundred and twenty officers and men each. This required four trips by twelve machines, four more being kept in reserve.

Colonel Quintin was yawning as we turned in, so I did not worry him with my query as to the soundness or otherwise of maintaining a number of highly specialised battalions, whose equipment, training and organisation were clearly quite unsuited to regular warfare.

We were up distinctly before the sun, and soon speeding down again in the car out of our park-like green valley into a more arid and sandy countryside. We travelled perhaps fifty miles thus, due west, over a passable metalled road. It took us now into rough black foothills, under the rambling lichened crenelations of a mediæval fortress, and the car roared across a lofty steel-girder bridge which spanned the river that surged through a wide gorge.

The hills fell back to our left, and the road ran through a multitude of stony dry stream beds athwart our course in a barren treeless plain.

In about half an hour more we left the main road, with its whitewashed milestones, and branched sharply north, to a broad swirling river. The car was manœuvred on to a great wooden ferry-boat, and carried across by the force of the current. The boat carried a pulley on a wire cable, and the stream was ingeniously utilised to do the work.

Another rutty country track met us as we landed. We bumped along this through a more fertile countryside and many villages whose narrow lanes were crowded with cattle, goats and small crimson-capped boys, who saluted

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like drill-sergeants. Here and there the bright orange head-shawl of a buxom woman caught the eye, set off by her huge black trousers and bright eyes. Our driver recked little of the life and limbs of His Majesty's lieges, and it was barely ten when we drew up in the midst of a little bivouac before a square-towered stone fort perched on a spur of the foothills. Another hospitable and bearded colonel welcomed us to breakfast in a room of the post.

Colonel Chamberlayne, for such was his name, explained as we ate that two more battalions, a mountain battery and a squadron of cavalry, would move out at about noon due north towards the trans-frontier group of villages which had been the objective of the aeroplane-carried battalions of the previous night. He added that they were probably fighting with the tribesmen at that moment.

His force, now in bivouac at Bringan, would advance to a position to cover the last few miles of the other's withdrawal through the hills, and to help the probably exhausted men to get their wounded away.

I seized the opportunity to voice my doubt of the night before.

Colonel Chamberlayne reflected before he answered.

" That controversy was very much on the tapis in 1920 and 1921, when people's minds were still full of the Great War.

" One school of soldiers, mostly with experience in France or Mesopotamia, demanded that all units of the Army should be equally efficient, trained for all-round work, and capable of going anywhere and doing anything.

" This sounded very well, but was really a counsel of perfection. They forgot that ' le mieux est l'ennemi du bien,' and that there is such a thing as human nature. They had their way in Waziristan in 1919 and 1920, and the result was that it took scores of thousands of men,

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and millions of pounds, to compete with about 3500 ragged Mahsuds.

" Bitterly opposed to this lot was the political party, whose slogan seemed to be the blessed word Khassadar, vulgarly pronounced Kussadar. This party wanted the Army to go right away, and that they should be allowed to carry on with a sort of casual labourer with a rifle, hired from day to day as it were. Him they called a Khassadar, in imitation of the Afghans, and to make all safe insisted that he provide his own rifle, so that in case he deserted there was no harm done. He might steal the rifle from the regular Army.

" The whole question was much complicated in those days by the Indian legislator, to whom a Mr Samuels had given, as by act divine, the right to sway an Imperial policy he did not comprehend, and to control an army enlisted from utterly different races. The few officers who survived from the happy days when the old Punjab Frontier Force kept the border healthy and happy were either too cynical to join issue, or too lacking in lingual agility for those demagogic days.

" The Solons of Hindustan vociferated so urgently that at last regular troops were withdrawn from the trans-border tracts and a stop-gap compromise put in to replace them. These were called Scouts, and were the old Frontier Militia under a new name, but slightly modified by having a larger proportion of men from within the border.

" They had three very weak points. Firstly, they tapped the recruitment of the best fighting races without contributing anything to the strength of the Army in a great war, or benefiting by its traditions. Secondly, they lacked the proportion of men from Hither-Indus—Punjabis, Dogras and Sikhs—that the old Piffers had found practically essential; and thirdly, they were controlled by a

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different administration from that which had to co-operate with them when anything really serious happened. In time, in spite of vested interests and political shibboleths, common-sense and logic prevailed, much assisted by the G.C.U. This was described by a lad who had swallowed the dictionary as "a monarchical revolution carried out by an imperialistic collection of socialist aristocrats."

"People were at last persuaded to recognise two main principles, which outweighed all the others. These were that every young able-bodied man of the real fighting races should be available to join the Expeditionary Force in a big war; and secondly, that frontier fighting should be done with a minimum of men, but those highly trained specialists, organised and equipped for the job.

"The problem was to dovetail these two principles in with each other. It was done by making the first four battalions of each regiment into Expeditionary Force battalions, designed for regular wars only. The fifth battalion in nearly all Punjab regiments, and in the old Piffer regiments the sixth as well, was made into a 'savage' battalion, such as you saw last night. It is designed for just one job in ordinary times, but on a general mobilisation it does two. As well as keeping its own section of the border in hand, it sends off its younger men as a draft to one of the first four, and then catches and trains all the recruits it can, to make more drafts."

"I think I understand," I put in; "but surely the men of your savage battalions are not much use in first-class warfare."

"Well," he answered, "every man serves in one of the E.F. battalions first, for three years, as well as doing his initial year in the training battalion. So he is a fully trained soldier on regular lines before he goes to the savage battalion at all. We realised that training for

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frontier warfare included all a regular soldier's training, and a good deal besides.

" The officers and N.C.O.'s all come from the E.F. battalions of their own regiments too, and do four years at a stretch with the fifth or sixth battalion."

" How many British officers do you have in a battalion, then ? " I asked.

" That depends," he said, smiling. " We have a lack of uniformity in many things that would turn a sergeant-major purple with yellow spots. The E.F. battalions have a war establishment of twenty, not counting the doctor.

" Twelve platoons out of the sixteen are commanded by junior British subalterns, but each company has a subadar major who fills the place of the second captain in a British company. Incidentally," he said, " our E.F. war establishments are identical with those of Imperial units, man for man and job for job. We have solved the old follower question too. To get back to the point. The savage battalions have a C.O., second in command, adjutant and quartermaster—British, and usually three out of the four company commanders. The training battalion has twelve British officers, and the militia and garrison battalions only three each. This gives plenty of room for the native officers to rise to seconds in command, and retire as lieutenant-colonels. I did not mention the militia before. They are the 11th and 12th battalions, and primarily draft-finders for big wars. The men do three months' training a year at regimental headquarters, which nowadays never moves."

I could not but admit that the whole scheme sounded very logical, elastic and sensible. I could see now that for Imperial purposes every young man was made available, and none were wasted or diverted to side issues.

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"There are one or two more points that might interest you," he went on. "Several old gunners had paralytic seizures when we demanded a pack battery to be welded into each regimental group. When we pointed out that the old Punjab mountain-batteries were not, and never had been, part of the Royal Artillery, they could not very well refuse.

"They made a terrific to-do about it, and said that they would very soon cease to be gunners, and become a moth-eaten sort of trench-mortar men.

"We pointed out that co-operation with the infantry is more important than trade mysteries, and a lot of the gunners agreed with us, so we had our way.

"They still groan a bit now and then, but the Pack Artillery School has to keep them up to the mark technically, and there is no more chat about bad co-operation in the field. They still have Royal Artillery officers, seconded to our regiments, just like the West African Frontier Force. The recruits do six months at regimental headquarters, and six more at the Divisional Artillery School.

"I forgot to mention that the regimental group has three cavalry squadrons in it, a field ambulance and some small units, which are all part of the regiment. They are all administered by an institution called the Regimental District Military Association, which is just like your Territorial Force Associations, only rather more so. It gets a share of the Army Estimates in peace time, and has to find everything out of that. It was not until we got this finance business decentralised and localised that we got the better of corruption.

"I am afraid I have bored you tremendously with all this," he ended.

It had interested me immensely, and I said so very

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emphatically as he led me outside through the steel gateway of the fort.

The morning was drawing on and the men under the walls had struck their little bivouacs, and were now putting on their equipment and cleaning their rifles.

The equipment and dress of this battalion was just the same as that of the one I had seen the night before, and it bore a very famous title in silver on its shoulder-straps.

A pack battery of howitzers was saddling up behind it, normal enough except for the small number of its mules. I saw the reason for that later. On the right was a squadron of cavalry, and Chamberlayne led me towards them. He explained that he had arranged for Quintin and myself to be given horses to ride out with the column.

I saw, with a little misgiving, that all the animals were stallions of a hard and wiry appearance. An orderly led a couple towards us. Their saddles were curious affairs, consisting apparently of a bare tree overlaid with a folded sheepskin. A pair of saddle-bags were slung across its seat ; it had wooden stirrups, whilst a plain snaffle served to direct the mustang.

The men of the squadron were dressed like the infantry, but with full-sized puttees strapped with buckskin, an automatic carbine slung over the left shoulders of half the men with a very broad sling, and a straight sword carried obliquely under the left thigh.

In answer to my questions, Chamberlayne told me that the man's mess-tin, water-bottle and the horse's grain were carried in the big saddle-bags, as also a shackle, picketing-peg and chain.

" Great thing about these little nags," he said, " is that they live on anything ; you can't knock them up, and they climb like goats. Kabulis and Waziris, this lot mostly."

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"What about your regular cavalry?" I asked.

"There aren't any," he replied shortly. "We have fast whippets to work over what they used to call cavalry country, and that's all."

The little column fell in and moved off in a very few minutes. Quintin and I rode with Chamberlayne at his invitation.

A stony track led us into the foothills. On each hand were low rolling spurs speckled with wild olives and euphorbia.

Little knots of cavalry galloped ahead from cover to cover over the most unpleasant-looking ground, with no apparent regard for the feet of their mounts.

Our own nags, by the same token, expended much of their time and attention in hostilities with their neighbours. As the path steepened, they began to devote their spare breath to the business of the climb.

We had gradually worked our way into a valley whose walls closed in on either side. Great boulders littered the track and the hillsides, on which scrubby cedars stood out among the olives, whilst an occasional birch or pine rose above both.

For the last few minutes I caught a distant glimpse or two of cavalry scrambling about among rocks that seemed really too rugged even for goats.

Then the flash of a heliograph came from the gully ahead, and I realised that we had a fair-sized body of infantry as an advanced guard.

The little handfuls of cavalry fell back as knots of infantrymen moved nimbly up the stark spurs to the hill-tops above. The handfuls became troops, and soon we passed the whole squadron halted in the torrent bed on our left. The cavalry closed up in the rear of the column, a troop detaching itself to follow Chamberlayne.

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He invited Quintin and myself to trot ahead with him to the advanced guard to watch the picketing of the heights.

Our ponies carried us at an ambling trot over the most atrocious stones to the infantry companies ahead.

They moved steadily on in file whilst their commander leapt about from rock to rock, followed by a trio of nimble signallers. As he watched the hillside intently, shouting an occasional order through a megaphone, I followed his gaze. Quintin pointed out to me that the placing of a picket was not a mere scramble up to the crest-line.

Each section or so was supported by a similar body, which put butt to shoulder in readiness to fire at anyone who opposed the advance of its comrades. As one advanced the other halted in position, and so alternately till the summit was reached.

I was surprised to notice that all this was done without checking the march of the column. Not less amazing was the speed and surefootedness with which every man moved about on the craggy hillsides. My mind went back to the slow and stolid trudge of the Zermatt guides of my Swiss holiday climbs.

Another point that caught my eye was the remarkable absence of transport. Quintin explained that each man carried only what I had seen ; the officers and the cavalry were allowed what they could carry on their ponies, whilst the pack battery took just the bare minimum of mules necessary to carry their guns and ammunition plus only two spares for each piece. If there were many casualties among the gun-mules, an ammunition load and its saddle would be jettisoned to give room for the gun-load.

In addition, there were a bare thirty ambulance ponies. Each carried a bundle of bamboos and canvas, which Quintin explained could be assembled into either what the

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Canadians call travois, or else into a horse litter to hold two men, carried by two pack animals in tandem. Besides this, they carried a reserve of drinking water in canvas bags, which could be thrown away to give place to wounded.

He added that only very seriously wounded men were allowed in the litters ; it was a matter of regimental pride that even seriously wounded men should remain in the ranks. " As for the sick," he said, " we have no followers and no wasters, so we have no sick. It simply isn't done."

Besides this, there were a few herculean individuals armed only with a pistol. They were each expected to carry a wounded man without assistance. The pistol was mainly to coerce any prisoners captured into helping with this transportation.

I was rather interested in the signalling. I could not help noticing that what seemed quite a long message was transmitted in a very few flag waves, not more than about a dozen Morse letters.

I saw no heliographs carried. Quintin told me that the flash-signal I had seen just before was produced by a small pocket-mirror carried by each signaller merely to attract the attention of the distant station. After this the message was sent, sometimes by flag, but more usually on a light shutter. A few electric lamps of diminutive size were carried, the current for them being generated by a hand-worked lever in the manner of the familiar pocket-lamp.

" The tactical code," went on Quintin, " is always used inside battalions. It is a combination of the naval tactical code for fleet exercises and the code we used with the Popham panel. You can send a long message with it in about thirty seconds ; a man can be taught the work in a month, as he only has to learn a dozen Morse letters, and no one has yet found a tactical message that did not

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fit the code. Still, there was a terrific amount of pig-headedness to be overcome before we got away from the old-fashioned semaphore and Morse spelled out letter by letter.

"The Signal Service, of course, stick to Morse, and they sometimes lend us half a dozen men for these counter-raids, mostly to communicate with the aeroplanes."

Meanwhile the column advanced, the path became steeper and rougher, the torrent bed shrank to a crack, the hill-tops became closer to us and lower, dotted with birch, and soon I caught a glimpse of a notch in the crest-line. This was the pass of Stor Sghar, our first goal.

It was, as Quintin estimated, not more than about five hundred feet above us, when I first heard the very distinct popping of rifle-fire ahead. As we approached, it increased to a very brisk crackle, each report reverberating again and again amongst the yellow-brown cliffs.

The gun-mules broke into a scrambling trot, and the battery came like lightning into action on the pass. On either hand I could just see an occasional head or the glint of a polished rifle butt that indicated an infantry picket.

I placed myself out of the way behind Chamberlayne, and looked down the pine-shrouded ravine to the north, to the broad valley athwart it below.

Down on the bridle-track, amongst the scrub, I caught an occasional glimpse of a knot of men. Lower down still on the spurs Quintin pointed out to me tall standards of green and red. Under each stood or crouched a drummer or two, whose music came faintly up to us.

A word or two jerked out amongst the line of guns on my left. The droning shriek of the twenty-pound shell followed the bang of a full charge, and it seemed minutes after the thud of its burst came up to us.

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Another followed, and then another. I saw the black spout of the high explosive go up on the ridge close beside the red standard. Its steeple-like, gilt-crested top wavered against the sky. A salvo followed, four bursts started up all around it, and when the black fumes cleared away the banner was no more seen.

Now out from the scrub in front staggered sweating and exhausted a string of men, each carrying a wounded comrade by the ' fireman's lift.'

Our stretcher-bearers darted down the slope, seized their burdens, whilst the tired carriers threw themselves exhausted alongside the track.

The travois and the litters had been put together, and soon the wounded were safely loaded, whilst a doctor busied himself with fresh dressings and a hypodermic syringe.

Our battery behind its screen of great boulders fired slowly ; soon the double plop of our rifles was heard on either hand, and the Kotal filled with a widespread line of our infantry. Behind it lay prone two or three companies of reserves.

I could now see groups of the Barak Regiment a bare couple of hundred yards below us, swarming up the spurs.

Here and there, too, were knots in blue-grey moving from cover to cover.

In an instant shouts came up, while steel flashed in the noontide sun, and breathlessly I watched men fighting desperately, broad knife against slim bayonet.

Suddenly bullets splashed on the stones amongst us. Quintin shouted " Look out," and the gleam of knives came from a fold of the rocks a stone's-throw to my right. I remember two vivid pictures, as someone thrust a welcome rifle into my hands. My world was filled for an instant with the fierce blue eyes and bristling moustache

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of a tall blue-shirted tribesman, linen-trousered like a Viking, and with the gold inlaid silver-chased hilt of the curved sword that a platoon commander grasped at my side. I fired as in a dream, and the world filled with greenish khaki. The platoon commander, with his foot on a tribesman's throat, lugged his blade out of the split skull and wiped it on a tuft of grass. His men knelt, taking quick snapshots at an occasional survivor of the rush who slunk back from boulder to boulder.

" Near thing," said Quintin.

Groups of the Baraks came over the crest, many with bloody bayonets, and some with bandaged limbs. Quietly they formed into platoons, lying close in regular lines just behind the Kotal's ridge. An aeroplane droned overhead.

Dudley came up, smiling quizzically as usual, to Chamberlayne.

" Followed us up a bit that time," he said. " Seven killed so far, and about four of the wounded pretty bad, but they have had a jolt or two."

" Right," said Chamberlayne ; " we'll stop their laughing in church." He said a word to his signallers, and soon the company leaders and the commander of the battery sat or knelt in a line at his elbow.

" I'm going to counter-attack. Dudley will take over the pickets along on either side of the Kotal, the cavalry will do those lower down towards Surkhawi.

" Dudley, you fix that up as soon as you have collected your battalion.

" When all your men are relieved, Allardyce, push on towards Kambela there in support of my counter-attack.

" Houston, I want you to limber up a section to come along with me. When that gets into action, you can bring

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along the other. We shall probably spend the night out ; then you will see what you will see, my dear Rivers."

He turned to his adjutant, who wrote out a message for the signallers to transmit up to the waiting aeroplane.

The dash and *élan* of that counter-attack were admirable. The men of the reserve companies darted over the Kotal ridge, and through its line of men, whilst the last groups of the Baraks were still herding in a few prisoners carrying wounded.

The tribesmen were fairly surprised, and the weight of that downhill swoop swept away their resistance.

Every man seemed to act for himself, yet formed part of a supple whole. Pairs and threes of men dashed into crannies of rocks with the bayonet. Bayonet men emerged, but no swordsmen. Two guns fired more rapidly, whilst long-armed stalwarts flung chaise, breech, axle and cradle on to the alert mules of the section. A supporting platoon at hand opened a dropping fire with the little shells of its hand-howitzers where a group of desperate men held on behind the piled stones of a little stronghold.

Soon the fight drifted away from us, as the winter sun began to sink in the heavens, tinting near-by patches of snow with pink and crimson.

The Baraks, a little tired and sweat-grimed, perhaps, but still smiling and joking, were concentrated in a close formation. The open collars of their smocks showed a sharp line of sunburn across the neck. The second section of guns was already making a move when Quintin called for our hobbled ponies and suggested an advance.

We rode on down a boulder-strewn path, steeper than that which we had ascended, between sloping walls of dark fir.

The fight moved fast, the tribesmen were on the run, and Chamberlayne, scenting out the vital point as if by

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instinct, kept them moving. Once or twice some little band of stalwarts endeavoured to hold a cluster of rocks or a ruined hut. Each time a shell or two from the mortars or the guns and a steady bitter hail of little one-pound shells started them from their bolt-holes. The ready bayonets or the cool deliberately aimed fire of the jawans lashed them each time.

Matters moved quickly, and yet it was well on in the afternoon before Chamberlayne called a halt.

"Kambela village is just round that spur," he said. "We will bivouac by this spring. Tell the signallers to put out the strips; and Allardyce, you send a company to get what they can out of the village. The other company commanders, come along with me, and I will show you where I want the night pickets."

The gunners off-loaded at once, and were soon watering their mules and cutting firewood for their evening meal. A company piled arms and followed their example. Curls of welcome grey smoke went up in the chill evening air. A grunting noise came from the heavens, and a signaller rose and doubled to the long yellow and red streamers of a message-bag.

Soon the companies who had formed the Kotal pickets marched in with a springy step.

Quintin remarked: "You will now see something unusual. First of all, there will not be any camp, except for the gunners, this one company and headquarters. All the rest go out on picket, and manage to be quite as comfortable, as they have big pickets.

"The next thing is the Elijah business. You may have remembered that the men took only half a day's rations."

Almost as he spoke I heard a dull crash in the fir-trees behind me. I looked round, and a jawan ran to the spot

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and disentangled an obvious hundred-pound bag of flour. "That's enough for a company," said Quintin.

Aeroplanes in ones and twos sailed against the sky, their klaxons sounding, and every few seconds there thudded down a bag of meal or of barley. Sometimes a small parachute wafted down a box of high-explosive shells or of rifle cartridges. One or two of the bags split on sharp rocks, but it was a useful quantity that ration parties from the pickets now started to bear up the hills to their companies, along with clusters of filled water-bottles.

Soon, from round the shoulder by Kambela, came a vociferating procession.

A gesticulating greybeard led the way. Behind him came sheep and goats, prodded and exhorted by laughing soldiers. Behind came shaggy ponies and mules bearing weird bundles, and last of all Allardyce, solemnly wrangling with three ancient and irate beldames and two more bent patriarchs.

The bundles disclosed hay and barley, milk materialised in earthen shards, whilst the sheep and goats seemed to melt away into the hands of various young N.C.O.'s of the 'Q.' branch.

"All clear in the village, sir," said Allardyce to Chamberlayne, "but I left a picket there. Methuselah & Co. are a bit annoyed, though, about their live stock and so on. Will you talk to them?"

The hubbub died down as Chamberlayne addressed the ancient deputation.

The descent of heavy consignments of eatables and ammunition from the sky had now ceased, and I had leisure to reflect on the simplicity of it all. I asked Quintin about the actual figures. He said: "A force of 2500 fighting men and a hundred animals needs only about seven thousand pounds of day rations and grain a day if it

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finds firewood, meat and fodder for itself. Add two thousand pounds more for ammunition and so on, which is about a fair day's consumption, and two of the big Vinci machines that dropped the Barak battalion can do the trick.

"As a matter of fact, so far we have always used smaller machines, doing a couple of trips. You could not do it if you had mobs of animals, of course; but if you are fed from the air, you don't need mobs of animals, or men to look after them."

"I can't understand why people didn't think of that before," I said.

"Well, they did," he replied. "They did a little bit that way as far back as 1915 in Kut-el-Amara. The trouble was that everybody had bombing on the brain. They did not realise that your lad of Yaghistan was not a fat over-civilised German, and that after the first once or twice, he looked on bombing from the air much as a London householder looks on his pipes bursting when it freezes."

"It is a pity it was not started sooner. I can quite see how it must add to the mobility of a force operating in this sort of country," I said.

"Well, I'm not sure that the Air Force did not think it a bit *infra dig.* at first. However, they always get a bit of bombing to do in these shows, and some ground strafing. It doesn't hurt the Pathan much, but it pleases them, and it is something to write home about to their best girls. Of course, you must have aircraft for big wars, so it costs nothing to use them for the little ones."

Chamberlayne joined us at a somewhat Robinson Crusoe-ish but hearty supper of grilled mutton, girdle-cakes and rum omelettes, operated upon with aluminium mugs and clasp-knives. He hummed contentedly as he told us that

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his pickets were all out in good positions, well fed and happy.

"I think we have stopped their sniggering in the synagogue—I mean the Kambela peoples. They lost a lot when the Baraks pounced on the villages the other side of the valley before the morning was properly aired. They lost a lot more during our counter-attack. Our fellows brought in twenty deaders from this valley only, and a dozen badly wounded. I don't think they will bother us to-morrow much."

The morning proved him right.

There had been a little sniping at the pickets during the night, and in our bivouac a gun-mule was hit. The gunner captain made far more fuss about the mule than he would have over losing a dozen men, but that is the way of gunners all the world over.

We slept on beds of pine branches wrapped in poshtins. The men lit great fires at the first chill streak of day, before which we crouched with steaming mugs of cocoa.

A short half-hour saw the column under way once more, climbing steeply back to the Kotal. Pickets guarded our flanks, now and then some marauder fired a random shot, here and there a jawan stumbled over the grisly signs of the day before; but we reached the crest by ten in a warm and welcome sun, to eat a meal and halt an hour.

The march down the south side of the range was quiet, but I for one was glad to be back in the post of Amazai, and wallowing in a hot bath after two long days in the saddle.

Outside there gradually mounted the stamp and swing and spin as the Khattaks of the Shalozans worked up to the heat of their dance, and the gyrating sword-blades gleamed in the bonfire's light to the skirl of the pipes.

I parted from my cheery hosts next day with no little

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regret, to face the journey on that barbarous railway down to the port of Karachi.

I had seen a good deal in these few days which filled my thoughts for a good many weeks to come.

In Whitehall I found a letter from Quintin describing the submission of the Kambela tribesmen. He ended: ". . . they had all the fighting they wanted those two days, but I am afraid we shall have to put it across them again soon. The maliks all came to the jirga frou-frouing loudly in white silk trousers made from our parachutes. Now the whole tribe has tapped the supply we dropped on to them, and it is making them dreadfully cock-a-hoop. Besides, their fair damsels want silk trousers too."

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